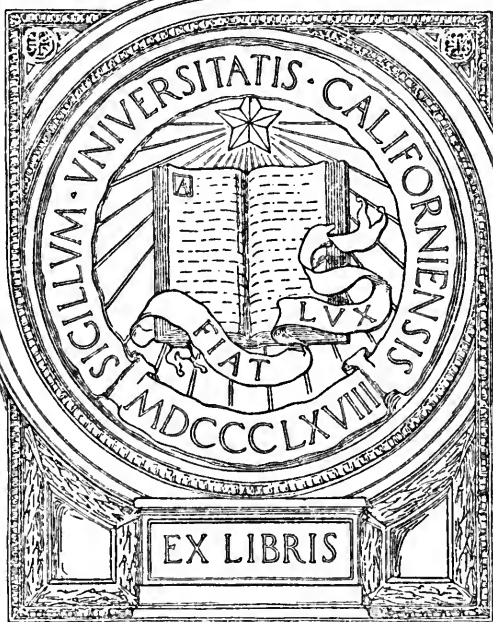


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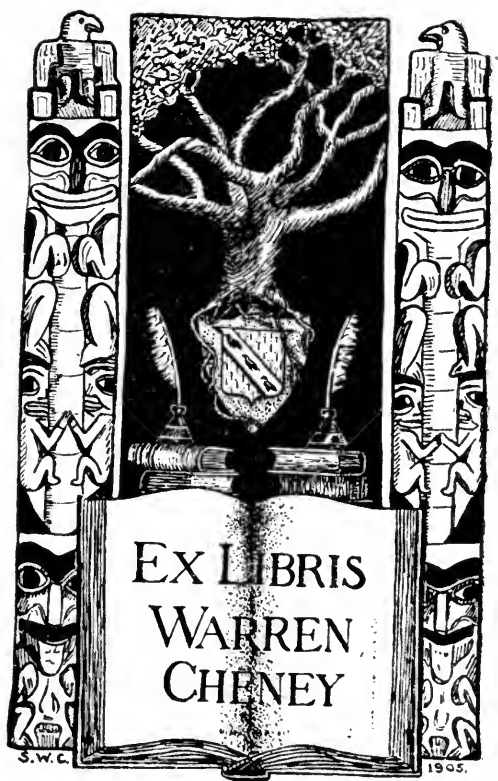
THE MISSION OF POUBALOV

BY

FREDERICK R. BURTON.



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Gift of Dr. Marshall C. Cheney

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A WEDDING BUT RATHER LATE

CHAPTER I.

THEIR WEDDING MORNING.

Ivan pulled aside the curtain and looked up at the sky. It was as clear as crystal, as blue as the eyes of his beloved, the promise fulfilled of a perfect day. On a window cornice across the street a tiny bird perked his head toward the sun and chirped noisily. To a lively imagination kindled by fond anticipations the twittering of the bird would have seemed like music. So it was to Ivan. His heart responded with unformed melodies, and some of their stray notes found their way humming to his throat as he hastened his toilet.

A long process it was in spite of his haste. Every outer garment, though but yesterday brought by the tailor, had to be brushed with exquisite care, and when it came to adjusting his tie, what with finding in the light of this beautiful morning that not one of the numerous assortment seemed to be bright enough for the occasion, and having rejected all in turn, and having selected one at last that might be made to do, and having found the knot and loosed it—well, time had passed, and under ordinary circumstances patience might have gone with it. Ordinary, the circumstances were not, and if they had been I presume any tie could have, and would have been thrown together in a shape not less pleasing than that which finally caused him to turn from the mirror in cheerful despair and ring for breakfast.

for she had been expecting it with quivering anxiety for the last half hour. Good soul! With eggs at thirty-five cents a dozen she nevertheless plunged two in hot water every four minutes, in order that her lodger might not trace the slightest sense of disappointment, on this eventful day, to her.

"I do hope his last breakfast here will be a pleasant one," she said when her daughter protested against the extravagance.

There was certainly nothing in the plain breakfast to call for criticism. Ivan might not have noticed it if there had been, for his thoughts were elsewhere, and his emotions were stirred by causes at once more delicate and more powerful than appetite; but Mrs. White was probably in the right. It would have been a pity to permit any chance of a jarring note however slight in the harmony that pervaded his being.

Ivan greeted his landlady gayly, and attacked his meal as if there were no such thing as love in the world, love that makes man melancholy, that destroys the delights of good living, that drives him to the production of gloomy wails in more or less eccentric verse. There was no such love for him. Out of the storm and stress of an eventful career, in which misfortune had rained its blows upon him with undue severity, love had arisen like the comforting glow of a home hearth fire, and it shone upon his exile with naught in its beams but serenity and peace. Ivan was happy.

Breakfast was hardly begun when Mrs. White again appeared.

"There's a gentleman to see you, Mr. Strobel," she said hesitatingly; "I didn't like to disturb you, but he seemed very anxious, and so I said I would see if you were at home."

She laid a card upon the breakfast table and waited.

Ivan glanced at it and frowned. So, there must needs be a cloud upon this day to remind him, as if he needed it!

how surely the sun of happiness was shining for him. Alexander Poubalov! What could he be doing in America, and what could have led him to call at just this juncture? Bah! there could be no significance in it, nothing but a memory of troublous experiences could be evoked by his presence, nothing connected with that past could possibly intervene now between him and the new life upon which he was joyously entering.

Mrs. White was sorely distressed, for she saw that her lodger was disturbed, and in her motherly heart she wished that she had told the stranger below one of those white lies that have come to be regarded as not sinful in that they effect at least a postponement of evil. She might have said that Mr. Strobel was engaged, or that he had given up his room a week before. Both statements would have been true enough for the Recording Angel's book, goodness knows!

"If you had only just gone, or if he had come an hour later," she murmured plaintively.

"Oh, there's nothing the matter," cried Ivan, lightly; "I was simply wondering what in the world he could want with me. I haven't seen him for five years. Show him up, please."

Not half satisfied that nothing was the matter, Mrs. White obeyed, and presently Alexander Poubalov stood upon the threshold. He was a distinguished-looking man, tall, swarthy, middle-aged, a remarkable contrast to his fair-haired fellow countryman, Ivan Strobel.

"I am indeed glad to see you, Strobel," he said, his deep tones vibrant as a church bell; "may I come in?"

"I received your card and I sent for you," replied Ivan, coldly. He had risen and was standing by the breakfast table.

"I shall be sorry if I have disturbed you, for I had no such purpose in calling upon you. Pray go on with your breakfast," and Poubalov took a step or two forward, as if waiting for an invitation to sit down.

Mrs. White was prompt in responding to the summons,

"To what purpose, then, may I attribute your call?" asked Ivan, without stirring.

"You are in haste, my friend," replied Poubalov, smiling; "you have probably learned the American habit of putting business ahead of all other things; but I see, too, that there may be some especial reason to-day for hurry. You are dressed to go out, and you have packed your trunks——"

"It is quite like you," interrupted Ivan, "to note every detail and attach some significance of your own to it. You are right, however, on this occasion. Time is precious with me to-day. I am to be married at noon."

"Ah! married! Strobel," and Poubalov made as if he would extend his hand, "I wish you would permit me to congratulate you."

"It is unnecessary," responded Ivan, remaining like a statue by his chair.

Poubalov shrugged his shoulders and looked disappointed.

"As you will," he said, "and perhaps it would be as well to postpone my call, as it seems you regard it as an unhappy intrusion."

"If you have any business other than that attending to a spy in general," said Ivan, "I shall be pleased if you will dispatch it now. If, on the contrary, you still have any interest in my movements, I will give you my itinerary, and you can follow me if you like. I will only suggest that we are not in Russia, and that it is not my intention to go outside the jurisdiction of the United States."

"You need only tell me, if you have no objection," replied Poubalov, "where I may look for you some time after your wedding journey."

Ivan picked up Poubalov's card and wrote an address upon it. "I shall live there," he said, handing the card to his caller. "I expect to return in two weeks."

Poubalov read the card and thoughtfully placed it in his pocketbook. "If I knew how to, Strobel," he remarked

gravely, "I would assure you that you need have no anxiety on my account during your honeymoon, or afterward; but I see clearly that now, as heretofore, you will place no reliance whatever upon my words, and that you discredit my motives."

"You speak truly," said Ivan; "but we will not discuss the reasons for my distrust. You know them even better than I do. You may spare yourself any words. I shall not be disturbed by anxiety."

"On another occasion, then, I may hope for a somewhat extended conversation. Good-morning. My good wishes would doubtless be repugnant to you."

Ivan bowed silently and Poubalov withdrew.

"Strange that I should be pursued after all this lapse of time, and to this far country," thought Ivan; "but I have done right. I have nothing to fear from Poubalov or the government whose paid spy he is."

He looked at his watch, and, resuming his place at the table, hastily swallowed a cup of coffee. Mrs. White's eggs remained unbroken.

A carriage was waiting for him at the door and it was time that he should go, for the wedding was to take place at Rev. Dr. Merrill's little church in Roxbury, four miles away. With moderate driving and no accident he would be there in time to meet the bridal party at the door. A happy farewell to his landlady and her daughter, and he was off.

He did not notice that as his coupe turned into Somerset Street from Ashburton Place, a closed carriage left its position not far from Mrs. White's door and followed. If he had observed it he would have thought nothing of it, for in Boston other persons besides bridegrooms employ public conveyances, and it is not always that a cabman is employed to drive a fare to a wedding.

Ivan's coupe rolled gently down Park Street, and just as it reached the corner of Tremont, one of the forward wheels came off. The passenger was precipitated forward, and the driver with difficulty kept his seat. He climbed

down in a moment, angry and bewildered. He could discover no break about his vehicle, but there was the wheel upon the ground, there was the body leaning forward, straining upon the shafts, disconcerting the horse——

“Open the door!” cried Ivan, imperatively; “I can’t be shut up here!”

The driver got the door open after a little trouble and Ivan crawled out.

“I don’t see how it happened,” began the driver.

“No matter. It can’t be helped in a minute, can it? I must have another conveyance.”

A crowd was quickly gathering, and as Ivan looked around him he caught the eye of the driver of the closed carriage.

“Are you engaged?” called Ivan. Then, as the driver signified his willingness to take a fare, Ivan recoiled. The carriage looked as if it were on the way to a funeral. He hated presentiments, and despised himself for the momentary feeling of discomfort.

“You can pull down the curtains, sir, after you get in,” said the driver as if he had noticed his prospective passenger’s discomfort. “Where to, sir?” he continued with his hand on the door.

Ivan told him and with a “Hurry, please,” bolted into the carriage.

The driver sprang to his seat as if his salvation depended on his speed, lashed his horse heavily, and the carriage fairly leaped through the crowd and down Tremont Street. It was a beautiful June morning and the passenger was on his way to his own wedding, but he did not lower the curtains of the gloomy carriage.

A gentle quiver of excitement stirred the congregation that filled the little vine-covered church on Parker Avenue as the clock tolled the noon hour and the organist began to play softly, his fingers weaving scraps of melody into a vague but pleasing harmony like the light that filtered through the stained glass windows. This was but

the suggestion of a coming outburst of harmony, for presently, as the joyful procession would be ready to move, he would open all the gates of sound and flood the edifice with the triumphal strains of the Wedding March, strains that seem light and music, too, to all listeners and beholders. Within the vestibule the bridal party awaited the coming of the groom. There, too, were Ivan's two friends, to do him honor by marching with him; one a Russian like himself, the other an American. With smiling faces they all endeavored to conceal annoyance that was speedily turning to anxiety over Ivan's delay.

Clara Hilman, as lovely a bride as ever donned the orange-decked veil, stood with palpitating heart beside her uncle and guardian, Matthew Pembroke. With awkward words he was trying to soothe what he felt must be her fears. All about them were pretty children dressed to follow the bride, and Clara's dearest girl friends. Within the chancel Dr. Merrill waited, wondering a little, but not permitting himself to attach hasty blame to anybody for this embarrassing hitch in the proceedings. The organist looked inquiringly at the group that had found places in the choir loft and they returned his gaze by shakes of the head.

"You are more nervous than I am, uncle," said Clara with an attempt at bravery, though her trembling lips betrayed her; "he will be here."

"There he is!" cried Ralph Harmon, one of Ivan's friends, as a carriage was seen to turn into the avenue from a street a little way off, and come hurrying toward the church. "Be ready to tell the organist," he whispered to a boy who stood near.

The waiting procession fell into partial disarray as every one craned his or her neck to see the bridegroom step from the carriage which now halted at the steps. All, nearly all, could see through the open doors as the driver dismounted and opened the door.

A shiver of disappointment passed over the wedding

party. An old, bent man issued from the carriage, leaning heavily on a cane and hobbled up the steps.

"This is stranger than Ivan's delay!" exclaimed Harmon in a whisper to his Russian colleague; "I don't believe old Dexter ever went to a wedding before unless it was his own, and I never knew he was married."

"Who is he?" asked the Russian.

"Old Dexter is all I can say. He's a kind of miser and money-lender combined, I think. I don't believe he's any friend of Ivan's."

"No. He's bowing to Mr. Pembroke."

Very ceremoniously but with a halting movement, the old man had taken off his hat to Mr. Pembroke and passed on into the church. Mr. Pembroke had bowed stiffly in return and then bent over his niece to speak to her.

Clara was by this time plainly disturbed. It was a quarter past the hour, and the congregation itself was getting nervous. A few persons came out into the vestibule to learn what caused the delay. The organist's flitting harmonies became monotonous, intolerable, and the rector within the chancel was not so impatient as alarmed.

A few minutes later the organist stopped altogether. The rector joined the wedding party in the vestibule. Clara had been taken to a room in the vestry by her guardian.

"If he should come now," said Mr. Pembroke, gravely, "I don't believe we could go on. The strain has been too great for Clara."

Dr. Merrill spoke to her as only a clergyman can speak to a parishioner, and minutes dragged along.

At last when an hour had passed, and there was yet no word from Ivan, the rector dismissed the congregation, and the members of the wedding party went homeward, wondering and sorrowful.

CHAPTER II.

AN EXPLANATION SUGGESTED.

"Wait for me a moment, Paul," said Ralph Harmon as the people began to pour out of the church.

He went to the room in the vestry where Clara Hilman sat pale and tearless. With her were Mr. Pembroke, his daughter Louise, and two or three other young ladies who were intimate friends of the unfortunate bride. Ralph did not approach the group, but paused at the door and looked significantly at Miss Pembroke. She went to him at once, and, unseen by the others, he took both her hands in his and said:

"I am going to Strobel's room and shall take Palovna with me. If I find any trace or news, as I undoubtedly shall, I will go directly to your house and report. You may tell Miss Hilman so if you think it will relieve her."

"Clara, dear!" exclaimed Miss Pembroke, impulsively, "Ralph is going to find Ivan, and will come back as quickly as he can to tell you."

For several minutes the bride had been sitting as if petrified, making no answer to the well-meant questions of her friends, unconscious apparently of their tearful sympathy, but at this announcement her eyes were lit by just a gleam of gratitude and she tried to speak to Ralph. Her lips quivered with unformed words, and she turned appealingly to her uncle.

"Come," she faltered, "let us go home."

Ralph bowed and returned immediately to the vestibule, where Paul Palovna waited for him. Both were accosted by many of the outgoing audience, but they shook their heads and hurried down the steps and up the street to the nearest line of cars. They said little to each other

on the way to Ashburton Place, for they were oppressed with forebodings, and the consciousness that they had nothing upon which to base speculation.

Once Ralph exclaimed desperately, "What can have happened!" and Paul answered, "He must have fallen violently ill." Both hoped that this might be the case, and neither believed it. Mrs. White knew them both, for they were frequent callers upon her lodger, and her surprise, therefore, passed all bounds when she met them at the door and heard them ask as with one voice, "Where is Strobel?"

"Where?" she repeated, "where should he be? Haven't you seen him?"

"No," replied Ralph, "he did not come to the church, and the rector dismissed the congregation."

Mrs. White threw up her hands and sank into a chair. "Why—why—" she stammered, "he left here all dressed and gay as could be."

"Did he seem quite well?" asked Paul.

The good lady remembered her surprise and disappointment at finding Ivan's eggs unbroken, his breakfast almost untasted, and she told the young men about it.

"That signifies nothing," said Paul; "I don't wonder he didn't care to eat. Did he appear to be troubled about anything?"

"Not when he went away," answered Mrs. White; "I thought he seemed put out when the strange gentleman called."

"There we have it!" exclaimed Paul, eagerly. "Who was the caller and what was his business, if you happen to know?"

"I don't know either. I never saw the gentleman before. He was here only a few minutes. He sent up his card, and though I looked at the name, I couldn't remember it, for it had a strange look, something like yours."

"May we go to his room? The card may still be there."

"I don't think it is," said Mrs. White, rising to follow

the young men who were already half way up the stairs; "I don't remember seeing it when I cleaned up."

When Ralph and Paul had vainly examined the catchalls, the vases, and every probable place into which a visitor's card might have been tucked, the Russian asked what had been done with the contents of the waste basket.

"My daughter Lizzie helped me," replied Mrs. White, "and took the waste papers downstairs. I'll ask her to find them and look for the card."

She left the room, and while she was gone the young men moved about nervously, repeatedly asking who the caller could have been, what possible connection his call could have had with Ivan's failure to appear at his wedding, and all manner of questions, vain and irritating, that arise when men are confronted by an emergency that teems with mystery. Mrs. White reported that her daughter had gone out and that the waste paper from Mr. Strobel's room had been burned.

"Lizzie may have seen that card," she said, "and I'll ask her when she comes in. I can't think where she can have gone."

"Was she here when the stranger called?" asked Ralph.

"Oh, yes, and until after Mr. Strobel started away. I didn't know that she had left the house, and I can't imagine what she went out for. Perhaps she'll be back soon."

"Do you know where Strobel hired his carriage?" inquired Paul.

"No, I don't. Lizzie might, for I remember he said something to her about it the day before. I wonder where she——"

"He probably ordered his carriage from Clark & Brown," said Ralph to Paul. He had no intention of ignoring Mrs. White's motherly anxiety about her daughter, but he saw no reason for attaching significance to her absence, and his mind was burdened with a growing conviction that something serious had happened to his friend.

"Suppose we make some inquiries," responded Paul. "If you will go to Clark & Brown's office, I will take a run around all the hotel cab-stands in the vicinity. He might have left his order at the Tremont House or in Bosworth Street, you know."

"I'm agreed," said Ralph. "We must get hold of the man who drove him. One of us is likely to succeed. Suppose, as Strobel may after all turn up at any minute, we meet here as soon as we can. I'll take in the Revere House as well as Clark & Brown's."

"I wish you would meet here, gentlemen," interposed Mrs. White; "Lizzie may be back then."

"I hope she will be, Mrs. White," said Ralph. "She may be able to tell us something about Strobel. It seems strange that he hasn't sent some word."

"I begin to fear that we shall find him at a hospital, badly injured," remarked Paul.

"Oh, I hope not!" exclaimed Mrs. White. "I declare! it makes me feel dreadfully about Lizzie."

The young men departed at once upon their errands. It was Paul Palovna who came upon a clew. He found where Ivan had engaged his carriage, and he went to the livery stable, which was in the South End, to find what had become of the driver and his passenger. He arrived there just after the driver had come in with his damaged carriage.

"I started in with the gentleman," said the driver, "but I broke down at the corner of Tremont and Park Streets and he went along with somebody else."

"Who was it?" asked Paul.

"I don't know. I never saw the cabman before."

"Whose rig was it?"

"I don't know that, either. I never saw the horse before, and the carriage was like hundreds of others that you might see in Boston any day."

Paul tried to think what ought to be done next.

"Did Mr. Strobel have a second accident?" asked one of the stable proprietors.

"I fear so," replied Paul; "we haven't seen him, and as he was going to his own wedding, his failure to turn up is rather alarming."

"Going to be married, was he?" the stableman spoke thoughtfully. "Then I guess you'll find that he has been made the victim of a practical joke. I suppose he had plenty of friends who were aware of his intentions?"

"Certainly, but I cannot imagine," said Paul with some indignation, "that any of them would have carried a joke to the extent of keeing him away from his wedding."

"Perhaps not," admitted the stableman, "but it looks as if some one had deliberately tried to delay him. Don't you know how the accident happened to our carriage?"

"No. What was the matter?"

"Somebody had loosened the nut of the forward right wheel so that it was bound to come off before they had gone very far. The breakdown was no accident."

"You are sure of this, I suppose," exclaimed Paul; "but when could it have been done?"

"When Mike was waiting in front of the door to Mr. Strobel's place. You'd better tell this gentleman what you told me, Mike."

"I waited there a good half hour before Mr. Strobel came out," replied the driver. "And while I was there a fellow crossed the street and spoke to me. He stood in the street kind o' leaning on the wheel. 'Go'n' to take Mr. Strobel to his wedding?' says he. 'I'm go'n' to take a gent of that name,' says I 'but I don't know nothing 'bout his wedding.' 'That's what 'tis,' says he, 'and a very fine man he is, and a fine day it is for the ceremony; and that's a fine horse you have,' and all that kind of palaver, till I thought he'd talk me blind. After a while he said good-morning, and went on, bad luck to him."

Paul looked at the stableman in surprise. "Could the nut have been removed then without the driver knowing it?" he asked.

"Yes, but it wasn't necessarily removed. It may have been started. You get up on the seat and sit back indiffer-

ently, as a driver would be likely to sit. Just try it. I want you to be satisfied."

Paul climbed to the driver's seat on the coupe, and the stableman leaned over the wheel.

"You see," said the latter, "unless you bent over and looked down sharply you wouldn't make out what I was up to, and not having any reason to suspect a trick, you'd likely sit still; more likely than not, if you was an ordinary driver, you'd look the other way most of the time; and—but I don't need to talk any longer for here is the nut!" and he held up a small wrench in which was the nut of the wheel by which he was standing.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Paul, smiling, in spite of his anxiety, at the dexterous way in which the stableman had proved that the trick might have been done. "What sort of man was this, Mike, who talked to you?"

"I dunno, sir. Medium sized, young, I should say."

"Would you know him again?"

"I would that!"

"By the way, did you see anybody call at the house while you were waiting?"

"Yes, a gentleman went in. I heard him ask for Mr. Strobel, and he came out again inside of five minutes."

"What was he like and where did he go?"

"I couldn't tell you what he was like. I paid no attention to him. He went away toward Somerset Street. The fellow at the wheel was talking to me as he went along."

This was all the information of value that Paul could obtain, although he asked many more questions. He found Ralph waiting for him in Ivan's room, and Mrs. White was there, overcome with anxiety on account of the continued absence of her daughter.

"I think," said Ralph when he had heard his friend's report, "that we'd better speak of this at police headquarters."

"Are you going to say anything about Lizzie?" asked Mrs. White.

‘Certainly not, unless you wish it. She will doubtless come in before evening.’”

“I don’t know,” murmured the landlady, despairingly; “she didn’t say a word about going out, and I’m dreadfully afraid! I can’t find her little traveling bag——”

She stopped suddenly as Paul wheeled about and glanced at her with a startled glance. There was a moment of silence, and then the Russian said quietly: “I will come back early in the evening, Mrs. White, and if your daughter has not appeared, I’ll help you to make inquiries. We must look after Strobel now.”

The young men reported the circumstances at police headquarters and then went to Roxbury. It was five o’clock when they arrived at Mr. Pembroke’s house, and they cherished a hope that some word from Ivan, if not Ivan himself, would be found there. They were disappointed. Louise Pembroke told them that nothing had occurred except that Clara had succumbed to the shock and strain, and was under the care of a physician.

“About an hour ago she broke down and cried,” said Louise, “and the physician said it was the best thing that could have happened to her. He would have been afraid to have Ivan return before that. Now she is not in any immediate danger.”

“Are you going to tell her what we have done?” asked Ralph.

“Yes. I’ll do so now.”

Louise found her cousin calm and hopeful.

“Ralph has come back,” said Clara. “I heard the bell, and knew it must be he. Well?”

“Ralph says, dear,” replied Louise, “that Ivan started for the church in a carriage, and that there was a breakdown on the way that appears to have been caused by a trick. He then took another carriage, and after that they do not know what became of him.”

“Lou,” said the sufferer, “I suppose people would expect that I should feel humiliation most of all, but I don’t, and if I did I should no longer feel it now that I know

Ivan started for the church. Don't you see? He meant to come, of course! Something dreadful has happened to him—" Her eyes filled with tears, and she paused a moment before continuing: "There must be more details, of course, but I am not well enough yet to hear them. Ask Ralph and Paul to come to-morrow morning, will you, please? I must talk with them."

"I will," replied Louise; "Ivan may come before that."

Ralph went to his home immediately after leaving Mr. Pembroke's, but Paul, who had no other home than a furnished room in a lodging house, returned according to his promise to see Mrs. White. He felt that there might be a chance that the daughter, Lizzie, could throw some light on Ivan's movements, but he had no doubt whatever that she herself had returned. He reached the house just as a postman was leaving it. Mrs. White stood in the hall, the door remaining open, nervously opening a letter. When she had read it she screamed, and would have fallen to the floor had not Paul sprung forward to catch her. She recovered in a moment sufficiently to sob:

"I'm so glad you've come. Lizzie has gone! Read what she says."

Paul took the letter which she tremblingly handed him and read:

"DEAR MOTHER: I am going away and shall not come back for a long time. Do not be anxious, and do not try to find me. You are not to blame for anything, and I cannot now tell you why I go. Some time I may do so, and I may write to you. I don't know yet. Do not think unkindly of me. You will know some time that it is best. I love you and——"

Two words here had been laboriously scratched out. Then came the signature, "Lizzie." Paul made out the erased words to be "I love."

In spite of himself a dreadful fear came over him, a fear of something more painful for all of Ivan's friends to bear than an accident, no matter how serious.

CHAPTER III.

AN IMPERFECT VISION.

Ivan Strobel had been a lodger in Mrs. White's house for more than two years. During the greater part of that period he had been the only lodger, and from the beginning his relations with his landlady had been more as if he were a friend of the family than merely a tenant. His evenings were not infrequently spent in Mrs. White's sitting-room, where his strongly domestic nature found some comfort in reading aloud to the old lady and her daughter, or in playing cards, or in telling them stories of European life. Sometimes his friends would call, and find him there instead of in his own room, and more than once he had been the target for good-humored chaffing relative to his supposed fondness for the landlady's daughter.

On such occasions Strobel laughed lightly, as if it were out of the question that anybody should seriously harbor a supposition that he was in love with Lizzie. That was in the comparatively early days of his residence there; and one afternoon, about a year before his eventful wedding morning, Ralph Harmon and Paul Palovna called together and found him in his own quarters, serving Russian tea to Mrs. White and her daughter. He was evidently delighted to see his friends, and he promptly set glasses of the fragrant, hot beverage before them. Mrs. White was enthusiastic in her praise of the tea, as well she might be, for Russians are past-masters in the art of tea-brewing, and Ivan was one of the most skillful; and she slyly intimated that the woman who would have the first place in his future household would do well to place him in charge of the kitchen.

Ivan smiled and blushed as if pleased at the allusion,

and while his friends commended the idea with noisy laughter, Miss Lizzie sat silent, sipping her tea with down-cast eyes. Shortly afterward the ladies withdrew, and Palovna immediately began to tease Strobel about Lizzie.

"On my word, Ivan," he cried, "you begin very badly. If you show her what a fine hand you have for kitchen-work, you'll never have any time to yourself after you're married. It's a fine thing to serve tea to your friends when you're a bachelor, but fancy a man setting the kettle to boil for his wife! Great Scott! what a picture!"

Both visitors laughed heartily, but Strobel, with a grave smile, held up one hand deprecatingly.

"I don't mind your raillery in the least," he said, "but it does injustice to the young lady who is the innocent subject of it rather than myself. I'm glad you came in as you did, for I have something to tell you, and, in fact, it was to tell Mrs. White and Lizzie the same thing that I invited them to take tea with me. I am engaged to Miss Hilman."

"I'm mighty glad to hear it, and I congratulate you," exclaimed Ralph, jumping up and grasping Ivan by the hand.

"And I, too," said Paul, not less sincerely; "pardon my joking. I hadn't suspected that the wind blew from that direction. When is it to be?"

Then Strobel told them about his plans, and from that day until this minute, when Paul stood by the weeping landlady, with her daughter's incoherent letter in his hand, he had never associated Ivan and Lizzie in any other way than as ordinary friends. When, earlier in the afternoon, Mrs. White had said something that seemed to suggest the possibility that they had gone away together, Paul's indignation had been aroused, and it was with an effort that he had mastered his tongue, which fairly burned to deny such an outrageous assumption. He had dismissed the thought later, with the conviction that Mrs. White could not have realized the true significance of her words.

Now, utterly at a loss to account for his friends' absence, he was compelled to face any suggestion that arose and make the best of it.

"There is at least some comfort in this, Mrs. White," he said, unsteadily; "you know that your daughter is alive, and she says she may write to you. She would not have written this had she meant to hide herself completely from you."

The mother's anguish was not to be tempered with this argument. The poignant fact remained that her daughter had gone away, deserted her home, and neglected deliberately to take her mother into her confidence.

"How could she?" moaned Mrs. White; "why, oh, why has she done this?"

Paul had hard questions to ask, hard for him as well as for her.

"Mrs. White," he said, "you have shown me Lizzie's letter; will you let me help you if I can?"

"Yes, yes!" she answered eagerly, raising her tearful eyes. The very proffer of sympathy and assistance helped to restore her to some degree of composure," and she opened the door to the sitting-room. "I forgot where we were," she said apologetically; "please come in and sit down."

Paul complied, and, still with the letter in his hand, began: "I shall have to ask questions that would be impertinent if you had not said that I might try to help you. Do you—was Lizzie engaged?"

"Oh, no!" replied Mrs. White, with a little gasp; "what made you think so?"

"I don't think so, and what I really tried to ask was whether she were in love with anybody?"

Mrs. White looked doubtfully at him. Her eyes were dry now, and she toyed nervously with her apron.

"My daughter didn't tell me she was going away," she answered slowly after a minute; "if she wouldn't tell me that, how should you expect that she would speak to me of her love—if she did love anybody?"

Paul was somewhat nettled at this apparent effort to juggle with his question. The situation seemed to him too serious to admit of anything but the most complete frankness.

"I don't ask how you know, or why you don't, Mrs. White," he said as gently as he could; "I simply asked for a statement of fact."

The landlady looked down at the floor, evidently trying to frame an answer. Paul would have dropped the matter right there, disgusted at her reticence if not her indirection, had he not been determined to learn everything possible that might throw light upon the fate of his friends. So he began on another tack.

"Weren't you invited to Strobel's wedding, Mrs. White?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied promptly, not suspecting the ultimate aim of the question; "both of us received invitations."

"Why didn't you go?"

"Lizzie didn't want to go. She said weddings always made her feel solemn, and I didn't want to go without her."

"Wasn't there a deeper reason, Mrs. White, for your daughter's reluctance to go to Ivan Strobel's wedding?"

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Palovna," said the landlady, glancing at him and averting her eyes.

Paul wanted to tell her that she was trying to dodge him, but he controlled himself and said:

"I mean that in my opinion your daughter was hopelessly in love with Ivan."

This statement did not provoke the storm that Paul had expected. Mrs. White's reserve had prepared him for an outburst of denials, indignant tears and the like, but the old lady sat very still, her hands clasped upon her lap, and after a little silence she spoke dreamily:

"Lizzie never told me, but I guessed as much long ago, poor, dear girl!"

Paul's heart sank as he felt his fears growing to convic-

tion that the flight of Lizzie White was closely connected with the disappearance of Ivan Strobel. He was not disloyal to his friend even in his thoughts; he kept insisting to himself that Ivan was not the man to play all his friends double, but even as he rebelled against this possible explanation of the matter, reason interposed its stern voice to say that if, after all, Strobel had discovered that he loved Lizzie and not Clara, this was the probable course he would take to avoid facing the comments and criticisms of his friends; and although he repelled the explanation with all his will, he nevertheless felt a dreadful sense of doubt.

"Mrs. White," he said gravely, "have you any reason to think that Strobel and your daughter went away together?"

The landlady started as if she had been shot.

"Of course not!" she cried; "how could you think such a thing? Why should you insult my poor child——" and she broke down and sobbed bitterly.

Palovna was miserable. He saw that he had utterly misinterpreted Mrs. White's reluctance in answering his questions; that, far from suspecting that Lizzie's departure might be an elopement with Ivan, she had instinctively tried to guard her daughter's secret.

"I am exceedingly sorry that I have hurt you," said Paul, contritely, "I don't think, cannot think that they have gone together; but, you see, I am in such a maze of anxiety about Strobel, everything is so strange and uncertain, that I—I hardly knew what I said."

He paused, and Mrs. White, still sobbing, uttered some words of which the only one he understood was "cruel," and he promptly accepted it as applied to himself.

"I can only repeat that I am sorry," he said. "Here is your letter. I fear I can be of no help to you unless you want me to take some message for you."

"No—you cannot do anything now—I know you didn't mean it. Please come again to-morrow—when I can think—please, Mr. Palovna."

So Paul left the house, wondering whether Mrs. White felt any unhappier than himself.

He turned into Pemberton Square, and went as far as the door to police headquarters, halted abruptly and turned away. He could not be the one to fasten a suspicion of such a character upon his missing friend. If it were true that he had eloped, that ugly fact would be established soon enough without his giving any hints to the police detectives who were assigned to hunt for Ivan.

The doctor had ordered Clara Hilman to bed, and under the first prostration of the blow she had willingly obeyed; but as evening came on and her mind cleared, she felt stronger, and at supper time she arose and dressed. She did not go down to the dining-room, and Louise brought delicacies to her chamber. She wished that Ralph and Paul would return, for she felt that she could talk with them now, and she longed intensely for any word, however insignificant, concerning her lover's movements. Louise sat with her, making well-intended efforts to distract her attention from the subject that was so terribly engrossing, and offering the comfort of hopeful assurances when it was evident that Clara could think of nothing else.

The fact was that Louise disturbed Clara. Her thoughts were fixed in their own channel, and so obstinately clung there that it grew wearisome to attend to the interruptions that Louise was constantly making. So Clara said at last:

"I think, dear, if you will forgive me, I would like to be alone a little while. I will call if I want anything."

"To be sure, Clara," responded Louise, rising at once and putting her arms affectionately around her cousin; "I will go to my own room, and will come the minute you need me. Shall I get you anything to read?"

"No, I cannot do anything but think, and I must think. Don't be alarmed. I am not going to let myself become ill."

There was a faint, sweet smile upon her sad lips as she

spoke, and, left to herself, she sat leaning slightly forward, her chin upon one hand, the other clinched upon her lap, gazing intently at the wall which she saw not. In its place was the carriage in front of Mrs. White's house, and as she watched it she saw the house door open and Ivan, her Ivan, come forth. She saw him turn to say good-by to the kind-hearted landlady, saw the happy smile upon his face, saw him enter the carriage, saw it start slowly away.

This much of her lover's wedding journey was as clearly before her as if it were now occurring, and she were at a window in the house across the way from Mrs. White's in Ashburton Place. Her nerves strained to their utmost tension, she tried to follow the carriage. She could see that it turned into Somerset Street, but when it seemed to be at Beacon she could not tell which way it went. That it was still moving was apparent, but there was a confusion of vehicles and persons, streets and buildings, there was a pause—somewhere—was Ivan getting out? Was that he taking another carriage? Oh! why was not Paul here to tell her just what happened at this point, wherever it was? Why had she not heard his report when he was there to make it?

Suddenly the confusion gave way, and the familiar wall was before her, but still she saw it not. Now she was listening. Did she hear her lover's name? Was it spoken in anger? It must be! it must be! They were speaking of him; who were they? In this house? where else if she heard it? Could it be that she had heard nothing? To her ear there was no tangible sound save the ticking of the clock on the mantel. Clara arose and crossed the room, staggering with weakness, and placed her hand upon the door. One instant she waited as if in doubt, and then she opened it very softly. Yes! there were voices below; they were in the library; that was her uncle speaking. Had she a right to listen? She stole to the head of the stairs and looked down. The library door was closed. The voice was an unintelligible murmur, nothing more.

Down the stairs she crept and came to the library door.

"Are you money-mad?" It was her uncle who spoke. "Don't you know that it hasn't come, that such a thing can't be effected in a moment?"

"And I tell you, Mat Pembroke," said a harsh voice, "that you've got——"

The voice suddenly stopped, and the speaker, the infirm old man who had arrived late at the church while the wedding party was waiting in the vestibule, half rose from his big chair and pointed with a bony, trembling hand over Mr. Pembroke's shoulder.

Mr. Pembroke turned about and saw Clara Hilman with wide-open eyes and pale face standing just within the doorway.

"Forgive me, uncle," she said in a voice scarce above a whisper; "I thought you were speaking of Ivan, and I—I came down to say that I am going to find him."

She swayed slightly as she finished, and Mr. Pembroke ran forward and took her in his arms.

CHAPTER IV.

CLARA'S SEARCH BEGINS.

Clara had not fainted in her uncle's arms, but she nestled against him quivering and sobbing; and again it was fortunate for her that the excited, pent-up forces of her brain had broken through in a flood of tears.

"You see, Dexter!" cried Mr. Pembroke in broken accents, "how my poor girl suffers. There, there, Clara, better get back to your bed and try to sleep. I thought Louise was looking after you."

"She has been with me," replied Clara, "but I sent her away. I wanted to think. Has nothing been heard from Ivan?"

"Nothing yet, my dear. You shall know it as soon as we do even if it comes at three in the morning."

Attracted by her cousin's voice, Louise appeared at this moment and led Clara upstairs, scolding her gently for having left her room. Clara was greatly subdued, and urged no longer to be left alone. Through the rest of the evening she sat quietly listening to Louise, and feeling no return of that tensivity of the nerves that had preceded and accompanied her waking dream.

In the morning she was better, stronger in every way. She met her uncle and cousin at breakfast, and although she was very quiet she seemed more like her natural self than they had expected. Every newspaper had something to say about the disappearance of Ivan Strobel, and the reporters, apparently, had interviewed everybody directly interested in him except the unhappy bride herself. The newspapers were in a pile by her uncle's plate when she surprised him by entering the room and taking her place at the table.

"I'd like to see the papers, uncle," she said after responding to his greetings.

Mr. Pembroke glanced nervously at his daughter, and laid his hand irresolutely on the pile.

"I am afraid you won't find anything of comfort in them, my dear," he said.

"No matter," she replied, "I don't expect to. Don't try to keep them from me. I shall get them later if I do not read them now."

Mr. Pembroke passed them all to her except one which he opened and pretended to read himself. He had already been through it, and he did not intend, if he could help it, that she should see it.

Clara intently read the account of the interrupted wedding in the first paper she took up, pausing only once to exclaim, "Then the reporters were here last evening!"

"Yes," said Mr. Pembroke, "they were coming and going until long after midnight."

"I almost wish I could have seen some of them," murmured Clara as she continued to read. The report told with fair accuracy about the break-down at Park and Tremont Streets and the explanation of it given by the stableman. Mrs. White was quoted, and as much as the reporter could imagine was made of the visit to Strobel by the mysterious stranger. Then there were interviews with the missing man's employers, State Street bankers, and the highly gratifying intelligence was set forth that there was no reason to suppose that Strobel had tampered with the funds or in any way betrayed his trust. Clara blushed with indignation as she read that the books would be examined in the morning, with a view to discovering whether Strobel had been guilty of any irregularities.

"The idea that Ivan should be suspected of dishonesty!" exclaimed Clara, laying the paper down and taking up another.

"People will think anything and everything," said her uncle, "and you must be prepared for the worst insinuations and speculations."

Clara read the next account in silence. It was much longer than the first, and a great deal of attention and imagination had been devoted to the romantic aspect of the situation. Clara was described as utterly prostrated by the blow, dangerously ill, refusing to see her most intimate friends; and the intended union of the beautiful orphan with the Russian exile was dwelt upon with appropriate grace and picturesqueness. She blushed for herself this time and laid the paper down impatiently.

"I shall show them," she said, "if they pay any further attention to the affair, that I am not prostrated by the blow, hard as it is."

"What do you mean, Clara?" asked Mr. Pembroke and Louise together.

"Just what I said last evening, uncle. I am going to find Ivan."

"Why! dear, what can you do?" cried Louise, pityingly.

"Do? I don't know yet what the details will be, but I can search for him. What better, what else could I do? If we had been married, and Ivan had disappeared, would it not be my duty as well as my inclination to turn the world upside down to find him? Should it make any difference just because the formal word had not been spoken that was to make us husband and wife?"

Her voice trembled a little at the end of this brief speech, and her eyes were moist, but she took up a third paper resolutely and began to read. She had debated her situation thoroughly in the long hours of the previous day and evening, and her determination to devote herself to the search for her lover was not the effect of a temporary hallucination. Her uncle and cousin said nothing for the present either to dissuade or encourage her, Louise, at least, feeling that in due time Clara would see the futility of attempting anything on her own account as long as experienced detectives were in the field. Mr. Pembroke left the room for a moment, and when he returned the paper he had been reading was folded and hidden in his pocket.

There was still another before Clara, and when she had read it she pushed them all away. saying:

"They're as much alike as if the same man had written them all."

Mr. Pembroke was relieved that she did not notice that one of the morning papers was not included in the lot she had read.

Hardly had they finished breakfast when the bell rang, and a reporter for an evening paper inquired for news of Mr. Strobel and Miss Hilman's health. Mr. Pembroke frowned with annoyance, but Clara was for seeing the young man.

"I don't want to be pictured as a useless, waiting, tear-drenched weakling!" she cried when uncle and cousin remonstrated. "Publicity? notoriety? what could be worse than the notoriety I have already acquired? Let me see him, please, so that he may have no excuse for describing me as a broken-down, useless incumbrance."

"I will speak to him first," said Mr. Pembroke, hastily. "Wait here a minute. I'll send for you when I have heard what it is he wants."

So Clara and Louise remained at the breakfast table, and a few minutes later Mr. Pembroke opened the door and said with an assumption of cheerfulness:

"There! you see, sir, the young lady is bearing her trouble more bravely than the morning papers announced. This is Miss Hilman, Mr. Shaughnessy, and my daughter, Louise."

Mr. Shaughnessy, thus introduced, entered the room bowing with old-fashioned extravagance. His head was bald as an egg, and his face was three-fourths concealed by a grizzly beard. The "young man" could no longer look forward to his sixtieth birthday. He wore gold-bowed eyeglasses, and in one hand he held hat and notebook and in the other a stub of a pencil.

"Char-r-med, ladies," he said, "to see you looking so fine upon this gr-rievous occasion. May I ask, Miss Hilman, how you passed the night?"

What with surprise at her uncle's maneuver in bringing the reporter to the breakfast room, and amusement at the courtly yet business-like manners of the "young man," Clara could not have repressed a smile if she had tried; and before she could reply, Mr. Shaughnessy had whipped his note-book to the top of his hat and written the significant mnemonic, "smile."

"I slept quite as usual, thank you," replied Clara.

"I am delighted to hear it," said Shaughnessy; "health, Miss Hilman, is the greatest prop in time of trouble. Have you any observation to make upon Mr. Strobel's absence? Any theory to account for it?"

"No theory, Mr. Shaughnessy, though I hope to have one some time later in the day. I should like to have you tell your readers that I have absolute faith in Mr. Strobel, and that I expect any theory as to his disappearance to accord with honorable conduct on his part."

"Yes, yes," said the reporter, scribbling away for dear life, that he might not lose a word of this important utterance. "Do I understand you to say that you expect to have news of your—Mr. Strobel before the day is over?"

"I shall devote all my time to searching for him."

"Clara!" exclaimed Louise, while Mr. Pembroke turned away with a despairing shrug.

Shaughnessy looked doubtfully at Mr. Pembroke, and then said:

"May I have the honor of calling on you later, then?"

"I shall be glad at any time," replied Clara, "to give you any information in my power."

Shaughnessy made a note.

"I hope you will pardon me seeming impertinence, Miss Hilman," he continued, "but our city editor commanded me to obtain photographs of yourself and Mr. Strobel."

Louise sighed and looked genuinely alarmed; but Clara thought a moment, and answered that she would loan the reporter pictures if he would be sure to return them uninjured.

"I shall be sure to do so," he answered, "and I commend your decision. It saves me a lot of trouble, for, of course, I must obey me city editor; he's a tyrant, Miss Hilman, and if you did not give me the pictures, I should have to get them elsewhere."

Clara smiled as she left the room to get the photographs, and when she had given them to Shaughnessy he took his departure, promising to call again.

"How could you give him the pictures, Clara?" asked Louise reproachfully.

"Mine will do no harm," answered Clara, quietly; "didn't you hear him say he was bound to get it anyway? Moreover, it may help in discovering Ivan, if only they will print a good likeness of him."

Clara was right in one respect at least. Nearly every evening paper published pictures of herself and Ivan, and nobody at the Pembroke house could have told where the originals were obtained.

"Now I must keep my word and begin the search," said Clara after the reporter had gone.

"You're not going to leave the house, I hope?" exclaimed her uncle.

"Certainly, uncle," she replied; "I feel quite well, and I will not overtax myself. I can stand anything better than staying idle here."

"I am strongly disposed to forbid you," said Mr. Pembroke, anxiously; "you are sure to have a most disagreeable and painful experience."

"Please don't go!" cried Louise, who had read the paper that Mr. Pembroke had concealed.

"I am sorry to displease you both," returned Clara, "but if I am forbidden to go I shall have to disobey."

"Then Louise must go with you," said her uncle.

"I should like to have her. Will you, Lou, dear?"

Louise was only too anxious to accompany her cousin, and accordingly they left the house together just in time to escape a squad of reporters representing the other evening papers. Clara had arranged her programme the night

before, and left word at the house for Ralph and Paul, should they come in her absence, to go to Ivan's room. Mrs. White had seen Clara on the few occasions when Mr. Strobel had served afternoon tea to his intended and other friends, and she fell into a great flurry of agitation when she recognized her at the door.

"Come in," she stammered as she led the way; "of course I am glad to see you, for I am certain you cannot believe it."

Louise tried to check the landlady from making the inevitable revelation, but Clara laid one hand on her cousin's arm and asked:

"Believe what, Mrs. White?"

"Why, what's in the paper," replied the landlady; "you've read the papers, I suppose? I presumed that was why you came."

"I read the papers," said Clara, "and I came to inquire about Ivan. Do you refer to the suggested irregularities in his accounts? Of course I do not believe anything of that kind."

"Dear, no! I didn't suppose you did. I meant about my daughter Lizzie."

"Your daughter!" exclaimed Clara in a low voice, while Louise hid her face in her hands. "What do you mean? Let me see the paper."

More agitated than ever, Mrs. White produced a copy of the paper that Mr. Pembroke had withheld from his niece.

"I must have overlooked this," said Clara, wonderingly, as she saw that the account differed in style from those she had read. The reporter of his paper, sharper than his rivals, had somehow discovered that Lizzie White had left her home, and he set forth the circumstances with every delicate turn that language would allow to suggest a connection between her flight and Ivan's disappearance.

"It is shrewdly suspected by the friends of Strobel," so the story ran, "that as the time of his marriage approached, he found his fancy for Miss White stronger than

his love for Miss Hilman, and that he chose elopement with the former as less dishonorable than marriage with the latter."

The writer then proceeded to an elaborate explanation of how Strobel might himself have arranged the wheel of his coupe so that it would fall off, and how he might then, by previous understanding with the second cabman, who was also conveniently missing, have been driven to the Park Square railroad station, where he waited for Miss White. It was entirely possible that they might have taken the one o'clock train for New York, if not the noon train.

Clara was very pale when she laid the paper down, but her faith in Ivan was not so much as touched by doubt.

"It's an outrage," she said quietly.

"I knew you wouldn't believe it!" exclaimed Mrs. White.

"Believe it! of course it isn't true! It's not possible!"

There was a ring at the door just then, and Mrs. White excused herself to answer it.

She opened upon Ivan's mysterious visitor, Alexander Poubalov.

CHAPTER V.

THE AGENT OF THE CZAR.

"Good-morning," said Poubalov, gutturally; "this is Madame White, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," replied the landlady, impressed at once by the stranger's deferential manner, and believing that through him the mystery would be cleared away; "won't you come in?"

"Thank you, yes. I have called to inquire for my friend Strobel."

"You are not the first, sir," said Mrs. White, opening the door to the sitting-room. "There are two here now who will be glad to see you. Miss Hilman, this is the gentleman who called on Mr. Strobel yesterday morning. Miss Hilman was to have married him, you know, and this is Miss Pembroke," and having thus awkwardly initiated a new scene, Mrs. White took refuge in the nearest chair.

Poubalov was as near to showing surprise as he ever permitted himself to come, and Clara, rising impulsively, went directly to him and said:

"Then you can tell me something about Mr. Strobel, can you not?"

"I can tell you nothing," he answered gravely; "I came for information myself."

Clara looked into his eyes searchingly, and went back to her chair feeling that her greatest hope had been dashed to the ground.

"I feel the awkwardness of my position, ladies," continued Poubalov (I make no attempt to suggest his dialect, which was at times almost unintelligible, as there was nothing of a humorous or trivial character in his con-

versation). "Every newspaper makes me out as a possible foe to Mr. Strobel, a mysterious ogre going about seeking to destroy young men, and perhaps I should not blame anybody for supposing that I might have been concerned in preventing Mr. Strobel's marriage, but I assure you that I was not. I did not know of his intentions until yesterday morning, when he told me about it himself. I am as much surprised as anybody to read of his disappearance."

Poubalov paused and with marked deliberation took out his card case.

"It was but natural," said Clara, tremulously, "that we should hope that you could throw some light on his movements, for knowing nothing except that somebody had called on him unexpectedly, we could not fail to attribute something significant to the visit."

"Especially," put in Mrs. White, "as the young men and I hunted the house over for your card and couldn't find it."

"All very natural," responded Poubalov, imperturbably, "and it was a circumstance of the utmost triviality in itself that lent color to my mysterious coming and going. You remember, Mrs. White, do you not, that you took my card to Mr. Strobel?"

"Yes, indeed, and he—I don't want to give offense—he didn't seem particularly pleased to see it."

"So you told the newspaper men. I am not in the least offended. Here is the card you took to him. I asked Mr. Strobel where I might call upon him after his wedding tour, and he wrote that address upon my own card. Of course I took it away with me." He handed the card to Clara, adding: "I want you to see that I am concealing nothing, and if my voluntary return to this house did not signify anything, your suspicions should certainly be relieved by seeing that Strobel himself made a semi-appointment with me at his future home."

"I hope, Mr. Poubalov," said Clara, with her eyes upon the card, "that you will forgive us for cherishing any un-

just suspicions. At the worst, they were vague, and everything is so confusing."

"I feel that there is nothing to forgive," began Poubalov, graciously, when Mrs. White interrupted, her mind naturally intent upon her own trouble:

"And such horrid things as they say, too! You said you had read the papers?"

"Yes, all of them."

"Did you read about my daughter?" and the distressed mother rose, and, taking the newspaper from Clara's lap, thrust it into his hands. Without looking at it, Poubalov answered:

"I read it."

"And what do you think of it?" cried Mrs. White, stemming a fresh flood of tears.

Poubalov's brows contracted slightly as a sign that he disapproved forcing this question forward at the time, and with a grave glance at Clara he replied:

"I do not think. I watch, ask questions, and listen."

Clara hardly knew whether to be encouraged or depressed by this answer. Unless this man were an intimate friend of Ivan, it was perhaps not to be expected that he should see the folly of supposing for an instant that the missing man had eloped with Lizzie White.

"Mr. Poubalov," she said, "the reports in the newspapers do not throw the least light on this matter. I have no criticism to make on their statements of fact, but their conjectures of every kind are idle. They do not even disturb me."

Poubalov bowed as if to signify that he heard and understood.

"The cause of his disappearance," she continued after a moment, "it is yet to be found. The newspapers have not even hinted at it."

"You have an idea, then," he said, "as to the correct explanation?"

"No, not one," she answered; "I can only think of accident; but had there been any accident so serious as

to render him unconscious and helpless, the police would have discovered it and reported it by this time, would they not?"

"They would if your police are nearly as efficient as those of European cities," said Poubalov, "and I have no doubt they are so to the extent of such emergencies as this case presents."

"Then, don't you see, the whole mystery is confined to two general solutions; either Mr. Strobel was seized by enemies and carried away; or he had some powerful reason for absenting himself, and disappeared voluntarily."

The Russian was surprised and deeply impressed by the young lady's clearness of vision, and Louise, listening with rapt attention, was simply amazed to hear her cousin reason so calmly when every word she uttered must have cost her pain.

"And which of these hypotheses," asked Poubalov, guardedly, "do you consider the more probable?"

"I have no means of judging between them," replied Clara, "for I have no fact except the disappearance to justify either one. It seems as if there must be some other theory, if I could only think what it is."

"There is no other," said Poubalov, "if you eliminate accident, as I think you properly do."

"Then I must consider what grounds there might be for supporting both hypotheses. As I discard as utterly worthless all the suggestions in the newspapers, I must suppose that Mr. Strobel had enemies, and that these enemies were powerful enough either to abduct him in broad day on a crowded thoroughfare, or cause him such sudden fear that he felt obliged to go into hiding."

Again was Poubalov surprised, for he could not himself have reasoned more clearly, or have stated his conclusions more concisely; but he simply nodded gravely, expressing neither convictions or emotions. Clara wished that he would speak. She had expressed her thoughts as they came to her there in Mrs. White's sitting room. It was thinking aloud rather than a statement of previously

formed conclusions. Now she saw to just what end her arguments were bringing her, and she almost shrank from it. Summoning her utmost resolution she looked straight at the sombre face of the Russian and added:

"I have no knowledge of Ivan's enemies, Mr. Poubalov; isn't it possible that you can give some information on that phase of the case?"

"Yes, it is," replied Poubalov, without hesitation. Then he paused a moment before he continued: "Were not the case so serious and for you so distressing, I should feel that I must compliment you on your unusual faculty for analyzing a situation. Far from taking offense at your continued suspicion of me, I am really pleased."

"I have not said that I suspected you."

"You did not need to, Miss Hilman. Your reason tells you that Mr. Strobel was happy and confident of the future until suddenly one Poubalov appears before him like the ghost of past misfortunes and as a prophet of new ones."

"I assure you," interrupted Clara again, "that I did not know that you were not an intimate friend of Mr. Strobel's; I spoke simply of natural inferences."

"My dear young lady," said the Russian, "you were helpless in the hands of your own reason."

Clara was silent. She felt instinctively that her analysis was correct and that she was facing, if not one of Ivan's enemies, at the least a man who represented all that might be hostile to him; and when she had endeavored to withdraw some of the force of her reasoning, he himself had held her to her conclusions and clinched them.

"It was my intention," continued Poubalov, "to learn from Mrs. White who you were, that I might solicit the privilege of calling upon you and laying before you what is in my knowledge concerning Mr. Strobel, for I fear that I may——"

He stopped abruptly and looked from one to another of the wondering ladies.

"Go on, please," exclaimed Clara, now stirred by a

growing agitation; "if you can give us the faintest light it would be cruel to withhold it."

"May I hope that no offense will be taken," said Poubalov, "if I say that I planned to tell these things to you only? I will be pleased to call at your own convenience."

"No, no!" replied Clara, rising; "I must know now. Tell me here. Mrs. White, may we step into your dining-room?"

Louise and the landlady had risen at the same moment, and Mrs. White said:

"If Miss Pembroke doesn't object, she and I will go out. Only, Mr.—sir, if you have anything to say about my daughter, I wish you would let me hear it!"

"It was not my intention to mention her, madame," replied Poubalov.

Louise went to Clara's side and kissed her.

"You are so brave, dear!" she said.

Clara gave Louise a grateful look as she and Mrs. White withdrew, and turned expectantly to the Russian.

"Pray sit down, Miss Hilman," he said; "what I have to say may not be as important and useful to you as you hope, but I preferred, and with good reason, as I think you will see, to discuss the matter with you alone. It was on my tongue to say that I may have been innocently a part of the cause that sent Mr. Strobel into hiding."

"Yes," whispered Clara, eagerly; "go on!"

"Miss Hilman, I am an agent of the czar."

Poubalov paused as if he expected this announcement to disturb, or otherwise impress his listener seriously, but she merely looked straight at him, as she did when he began to speak.

"Strobel knew me in that capacity," he continued, "years ago when we were in Russia. Has he ever told you about his life there?"

"A little," replied Clara, very doubtful how much she ought to reveal to this man who represented the autocratic, relentless power that had destroyed the fortune of the Strobel family and made Ivan himself an exile.

"You find it difficult to be frank with me," said Poubalov, "and I am not surprised, but you must remember that I am setting the example. It is quite the habit of thoughtless persons to apply an opprobrious epithet to my occupation and call me a spy. Well, then, I, Alexander Poubalov, spy, paid by the government of Russia, tell you who I am, and tell you that at one time Ivan Strobel had reason to fear me."

The door bell rang while Poubalov was speaking and Clara heard Mrs. White pattering through the hall to answer it.

The man at the door was known to the landlady as Strobel's tailor, an undersized, forlorn-looking man who seemed always to be struggling with secret woe. She knew that Strobel had been kind to him, and helped him in more ways than mere patronage, and she knew that poor Litizki was as grateful and loyal as a dog. It was with sincere welcome, therefore, that she greeted him, and asked him into the house.

"I only came," said the tailor, "to ask if there is any news of Mr. Strobel? The newspapers say he has disappeared."

"We know nothing of him here," answered Mrs. White; "but come in, do! There's no telling who may say the word that will put us all on the right track. Miss Hilman is here, the lady he was to marry, you know. She's talking with a gentleman now in the parlor. I presume she may like to see you."

"I don't know that I can give her any help," said Litizki, following the landlady into the dining-room, "but I'll wait a few minutes, for I wanted to know something that the papers do not make clear."

He came to a sudden halt as he stepped into the dining-room, where the voices of the persons in the front room were heard much more distinctly than in the hall.

"Who is that talking?" he exclaimed in an excited whisper.

"It's a gentleman who called on Mr. Strobel yesterday," replied Mrs. White; "I can't think of his name."

"I should know that voice," muttered Litizki as if speaking to himself.

The rooms were separated by folding doors with glazed glass panels. On one of the panels there was a tiny spot where the opaque glaze had been rubbed or knocked off. Litizki applied his eye to that spot, and shaded the glass with his hand, straining to get a clear view of the man whose deep voice came to him like the distant rumble of an organ.

After a moment he straightened up and turned about, his sallow, depressed features gleaming with savage interest.

"I cannot see clearly," he whispered, "but if that is Alexander Poubalov, then the whole mystery of Strobel's disappearance is cleared away!"

CHAPTER VI.

LITIZKI AT WORK.

"It would have been perfectly natural," continued Poubalov, "for Strobel to suspect me at first blush of evil intentions, and I presume he did so; for, without inquiring what brought me to America and to him, he took pains to remind me that he was within the jurisdiction of the United States, and that it was not his purpose to set foot outside the limits of your country, of which I presume he is by this time a citizen."

"He has taken out his first papers," replied Clara.

"And, therefore, should have felt himself secure from one who, supposing he were hostile, yet acted as the official of a foreign and a friendly government. I give you credit, Miss Hilman, of drawing a correct conclusion from that statement of relations."

Poubalov paused, and Clara responded slowly:

"It ought to mean that he had other enemies than you or those whom you represent."

"Exactly; but why do you hedge—pardon the term—why do you set forth the conclusion with reservation? 'It ought to mean,' is what you said. Why not say it does mean?"

"Because I do not know whether you are telling me the truth."

Poubalov leaned back in his chair, and his dark face was momentarily illumined by an amused smile.

"May I light a cigarette?" he asked in a tone that seemed to say how patient he was under this continuance of suspicion that not even reason could dissipate. It was as if he had said, "With all your unexpected cleverness

as a logician, Miss Hilman, you are yet a woman, and you cling desperately to woman's reasonless intuitions."

"Oh, pardon me if I am cruelly unjust," cried Clara, as clearly the woman in her quick relenting as she was in following her intuitions; "have patience with me! You must know how distressed I am, and how hard it is to think clearly. Your very admission that you are a paid spy suggests deceit and trickery—I suppose I am making the matter worse."

"By no means, Miss Hilman," replied Poubalov, holding a cigarette between his fingers; "we shall come to an understanding presently, I am sure. I never take offense, not even when my loyalty to the czar is doubted; and nothing you may say will prevent me from doing what I can to clear away the mystery surrounding Mr. Strobel."

"Please light your cigarette," said Clara; "if you wouldn't make me talk, we should get on better."

Poubalov smiled again, and when he had puffed a great cloud of fragrant smoke from his lips, he resumed:

"I will proceed as if you cherished no doubts as to my sincerity. It follows, from my analysis, that Mr. Strobel could have had no fear of harm coming to him from an official of Russia. He never had reason to fear me as an individual; in fact, the individuality of Alexander Poubalov long since disappeared in the person of the official agent. Poubalov has no enmities, no friendships; all men are hostile or friendly to him, as they are the enemies or the adherents of the czar, whom God preserve! The next step in the analysis is to suggest the nature of Mr. Strobel's present enemies. You did not tell me so, but I presume you are aware that when Mr. Strobel was younger he permitted his generous sympathies to be enlisted in what he would then have called 'the people's party' of Russia. Without going into details with which every intelligent person is more or less familiar, I will remind you that, incidental to the so-called democratic movement in Russia, was the organization of a secret society the

avowed purpose of which was the disruption of the empire."

Poubalov paused, and puffed at his cigarette deliberately.

"You want me to say something," cried Clara in desperation, "and I don't know what to say."

"Pardon me," said the spy, suavely, "a woman of your cleverness will not resent it when I tell you that you misstate your difficulty. You could say much, perhaps, but you are afraid to."

Clara's silence was an admission that Poubalov had spoken correctly, and after giving her ample time to deny his accusation, he continued:

"You are afraid—and again you will pardon plain language—that you will involve your lover in fresh difficulties. Let me point out again that, so far as his offenses against the government of the czar are concerned, they were purely political offenses, and he is therefore in a perfectly secure asylum as long as he is on American soil, whether he be simply a refugee or a naturalized citizen. You must seek for his enemies, Miss Hilman, elsewhere than among the representatives of Russian authority."

"You give me too much credit for cleverness," said Clara, "for I cannot follow you."

"You know that the secret society to which I referred adopted the term nihilism as a definition of its principles, do you not? And you must know, even if Mr. Strobel never told you so, that the Nihilists were bound by the most awful oaths never to betray the secrets of their association."

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Strobel was a Nihilist?"

"Certainly; that was what I was driving at from the beginning. It was for that he was compelled to fly from Russia, and that is why he cannot return to his native land. The government has done much to stamp out the curse of nihilistic propaganda, and many members of the society have fled. Some are in Switzerland, some in England, others are here, here in Boston. Far from the field

of their evil machinations, they cherish still their destructive ambitions as applied to Russia; and, Miss Hilman, they still keep watch on one another. It would fare ill with any Nihilist in America should he venture to betray his former associates in any way."

"I suppose I understand you now" said Clara, slowly. "You mean that I must look for Ivan's enemies among the Russian exiles who live in Boston."

"Or elsewhere in America."

"If he really were connected with them in Russia, he would be the last man to betray them."

"Doubtless; but would they credit him with such loyalty? May they not have imagined that, under certain circumstances, he might be induced to betray them? And may they not have conveyed such definite and fearful threats that he found it necessary to disappear?"

"Do you mean by 'certain circumstances' his intended marriage?"

"No. I may not mean anything. We shall see some day whether I do or not."

"You speak in a constant succession of riddles. Why not continue your frankness, and be strictly open with me?"

Poubalov lit a fresh cigarette, and after a long scrutiny of the ceiling, responded:

"That is not my way, Miss Hilman. I am sincerely trying to suggest the clew to your difficult problem."

Clara took her own turn at reflection, and said at last:

"If Ivan felt obliged to disappear for a time, in order to escape his enemies, he would have managed to let me know."

"It would seem so," admitted Poubalov, rising; "and that brings you to your last alternative."

"Wait," exclaimed Clara, imperatively; "you bring me to the last alternative as if that were the end of my difficulties. Suppose it to be true that some Russian exiles, in a mistaken distrust of Mr. Strobel, have abducted

him. Can you not suggest how I am to proceed to prove that and to rescue him?"

"I hope to be able to do so, Miss Hilman, in a short time, a few days at most, and I assure you that I shall henceforth give my undivided attention to searching for Mr. Strobel."

Clara knitted her brows in painful perplexity.

"A woman situated as I am," she said presently, "ought to be stirred by nothing but gratitude; but the one thing I can think to say is, why do you interest yourself so deeply in the matter?"

"Still distrustful," said Poubalov in his deepest tones. "Miss Hilman, I might resort to sophistry and direct deceit in answering your question. I might point out that the newspapers have placed me, though not as yet by name, in a disagreeable position from which it should be my earnest desire to extricate myself. I might declare that I was moved by friendship or admiration for Mr. Strobel. But it does not please me to practice arts of trickery with you. Public notoriety I care as little for as for the fly that buzzes harmlessly about my head. I never had friendship or admiration for Mr. Strobel, and I feel neither sentiment now. Alexander Poubalov's one sentiment is loyalty to his czar."

"You haven't answered the question."

"Because I cannot answer it without either deceit or the betrayal of my trust. But I shall nevertheless use every endeavor to find your lover. Will you care to hear from me from time to time?"

"Yes," replied Clara, after a moment's thought; "certainly, yes. I do thank you for speaking to me as you have, and I wish I could trust you. I almost do trust you."

"It would be too ungracious in me," responded Poubalov, "not to wish that you could trust me, and not to hope that some time in the near future you will find that in this matter you can do so absolutely."

"I suppose it would be vain to ask you what you are going to do?"

"As vain as for me to ask you to tell me all I would like to know about Mr. Strobel."

"Mr. Poubalov," exclaimed Clara, earnestly, "there can be no reason why I should withhold anything from you. Your own argument proves that; and, besides, you know more about Ivan's connection with the nihilistic movement than I ever dreamed of. You perceive the distrust that I cannot conquer, but you believe me, do you not?"

"Implicitly, Miss Hilman."

"Then I assure you that, to my knowledge, Mr. Strobel has not had anything to do with nihilistic propaganda in this country for three years at least. He used to write some on Russian topics, but he abandoned that when he went into business, and—I may say, when he became acquainted with me. I think I know all his friends, all his associates, and among them all there is but one Russian, a gentleman like himself."

"I am very glad to hear this," said Poubalov; "and now I will see what I can do. I cannot act as I would in Russia, but I can still accomplish something, I think. I hope to have the honor of calling upon you soon. I leave it entirely to you to speak of our conversation as you please, but I will go out without disturbing Madame White and your friend. Au revoir, Miss Hilman."

The distinguished-looking Russian bowed and left the room and immediately afterward Clara heard the outside door close upon him.

When Litizki, the forlorn-looking tailor, mentioned Poubalov's name, both Mrs. White and Louise Pembroke exclaimed "That's it!" and both came forward as if their anxiety were about to be dissipated at one stroke.

"Who is he?" asked Mrs. White, eagerly.

"He is—" began Litizki fiercely; "no! I must not speak. Let me go out, that I may watch him. He shall lead me to Ivan Strobel. Do not tell him that I have been here, do not mention my name."

"Dear me! it makes me more nervous than ever," said Mrs. White, laying a hand on Litizki's arm to restrain him. "Do you think, Mr. Litizki, that he has done anything to Mr. Strobel?"

"Think!" exclaimed the little tailor who seemed on fire with excitement, "it is the next thing to knowing! Not a word, remember!"

He tip-toed his way through the hall as if it were night and he were a thief, and cautiously opened the outside door. He touched his hand dramatically to his lips as he closed it behind him, leaving Mrs. White terrified and Miss Pembroke bewildered.

Litizki, even in a tumult of rage and desperation, was not a very impressive man to look at. It would have seemed that his fury could be quelled by a gentle cuff with the open hand, and that his whole being could be snuffed out with a vigorous pinch; but if ever man was terribly in earnest, he was, and a close observer might have noted the danger signals in the formation of his head and in the hang of his lips. This was a man who might be stirred to such depths that his whole shallow nature would be in commotion, when discretion would be cast off like flecks of foam from an on-rushing wave; and then let an enemy be wary, for even a slender arm, like that of the little tailor, may strike a fatal blow!

It seemed a long, long time to Litizki that Poubalov continued his conversation with Miss Hilman. He dared not linger near the house lest the spy should see him from a window, or emerge suddenly from the doorway and so discover that eager eyes were directed to his movements. Litizki slunk into one doorway after another, never staying long in one, lest he be warned away with sufficient outcry to alarm Poubalov, whose ear, he believed, was acutely tuned to the slightest sounds, and who found untoward significance even in the vagrant breeze.

At last the door opened, and Litizki dodged into an open hall, only to flit out again as soon as he saw Poubalov turn toward Somerset Street. Arrived there, he turned down

the hill, and then Litizki ran forward to the corner around which he peered cautiously. It would not have surprised him if his face had touched that of Poubalov as he did so, for it would have seemed to him but natural that the spy should think that he was followed and should wait there for the purpose of trapping his adversary. But, no; Poubalov was progressing calmly down the street, and at Howard he again turned to the left.

Litizki ran after, fearful of losing his man in the more crowded street, saw him cross Bulfinch into Bulfinch Place, and finally open the door of a lodging house with a latch-key.

So!" thought the tailor, noting the number of the house and turning back, "he chooses his room within a stone's throw of Ivan Strobel's, and then takes a round-about way to go from one house to the other. That is like him. Alexander Poubalov could not be direct in conversation or action even if he were intent upon a good deed—which would be impossible."

The suggestion was so grotesquely absurd that Litizki laughed and shuddered at once.

"Now," he reflected, "shall I tell the police where to look for Ivan Strobel, or shall I consult with his lady? I will go back and see her first."

CHAPTER VII.

A DANGEROUS MAN.

For some minutes after Poubalov left the house Clara sat motionless, reviewing the strange discourse of the Russian, trying to persuade herself one moment to trust him, and the next impulsively throwing aside the theories so finely spun from his inuendoes and circumlocutions. She shuddered at the thought of Ivan in the hands of such fanatics as she knew were included in the most rabid enemies of Russian polity, and as promptly felt such a solution of the mystery to be impossible. Equally impossible seemed the solution that premised a fear on the part of Ivan so great that he dared not let even his intended wife know of his whereabouts.

Removed from the influence of Poubalov's magnetic personality and his subtle arguments, Clara felt that it was to him rather than to the Nihilists that she must look for implacable hostility to Ivan. Yet why should Ivan, resident in and prospective citizen of the United States, fear him, an "official agent of a friendly government"? Fear? That was not like the Ivan she knew and loved! Was it not again impossible that her lover should have been so stirred by fear of anybody or anything as to take flight and conceal his hiding-place from her?

On the other hand, how could she know what influences had been suddenly applied to Ivan to make him take a seemingly indefensible if not impossible course? And what was more impossible, in any of the suggested solutions, than his very disappearance, which was a painful fact, although hard to realize even after nearly twenty-four hours had passed since the time set for his wedding?

The dining-room door was softly opened, and Mrs. White put in her head.

"Has he gone?" she whispered.

"Yes," replied Clara, starting up as if she had been aroused from sleep. "Come in."

Louise approached her cousin solicitously.

"We have had such a fright!" she said taking Clara in her arms; "I didn't know whether to be more alarmed when we could hear his deep voice than after the sound of it had ceased altogether."

"Why should you have feared?" asked Clara; "you couldn't suppose that I was in any danger in Mrs. White's house, could you?"

"No," answered Louise, "but the air is full of excitement; and while Mr. Poubalov was talking, another Russian came in who is friendly to Ivan. Mrs. White says he is a tailor, a very poor man whom Ivan befriended, and an exile like himself. He recognized Poubalov's voice, and declared positively that his presence here explained Ivan's fate. He was terribly agitated and refused to stay, saying that he must follow Poubalov. We couldn't tell what to make of it."

This little narration came as a new shock to Clara. She had told Poubalov that among all of Ivan's friends there was but one Russian, and she had in mind, of course, Paul Palovna. She had never heard of this tailor, and although it might not follow that Ivan would count among his friends a poor man whom he might have befriended, was it not a reasonable inference that this poor man was a Nihilist? and that if there were one brought to light, that there might be many others whose identity would ever remain unknown to her? Had she not heard how the great body of the nihilistic society was made up of the poor? and this man had recognized Poubalov! That was significant, surely; but just what inference of value she should draw from it was anything but clear.

While these thoughts and questions were chasing through her brain, Litizki and Paul Palovna arrived at

the house, coming from different directions. Paul approached Clara with marked constraint.

"Do not be afraid, my friend," she said, extending her hand; "I am quite strong and hopeful. I have read the papers, all of them, and they do not disturb me. I cannot thank you enough for what you did for me yesterday."

"I am glad to hear you speak so bravely," responded Paul; "you mustn't feel indebted to me, however, for Strobel is the best friend I ever had, and it would be strange indeed if I did not try to find him. I suppose it is almost unkind to ask if there is any news?"

"There is none exactly, and yet I have heard some things that you can advise me about better than anybody else."

"Miss Hilman," interposed Mrs. White, "this is Mr. Litizki, the man Miss Pembroke was telling you about."

Clara, intent upon referring Poubalov's suggestions to Paul, had not seen the little tailor come in. Now she turned and confronted Litizki with mingled hope and alarm; hope that this man, whose positive utterance had been reported, might give her a definite clew; alarm lest he be one of the most irreconcilable of revolutionists, a man who would sacrifice friends and family for a cause that he imagined just. Her doubts increased as she saw the wild gleam in his small eyes, that lit up his sallow face and made it glow with fierce intensity. Ivan had befriended him; must she distrust him, too?

"I am glad to see you," she said with a quick resolution to win this man, and she surprised the tailor and made him speechless for the moment by grasping his hand warmly. "You have come to tell me something about Mr. Poubalov, or Mr. Strobel, or both?"

Litizki, embarrassed and awed by this queenly young woman who looked into his eyes so searchingly and withal so graciously, cleared his throat, shifted about on his feet, and a faint tinge of red actually found its way to his sunken cheeks.

"Yes," he answered after a moment, catching his breath

with a gasp and swallowing as if he took oxygen into his system by way of his stomach; "yes, Miss Hilman, about both, if you please."

He paused, excitement and embarrassment making it difficult to say anything coherently.

"Poubalov?" said Paul, whose brows had contracted ominously when he heard the name, and who took advantage of the pause to ask, "What Poubalov is that?"

"Can there be more than one who would hound a poor Russian the world over?" rasped Litizki, turning upon Paul, intense excitement blazing again in his usually dull eyes; "it is none other than Alexander Poubalov, spy, informer, traitor!"

The little tailor trembled visibly as he hissed these words, and he turned to Clara as if to make certain that they should impress her deeply.

"What, in the name of all that is right, does Poubalov do here?" asked Paul.

"Do?" cried Litizki; "does he ever do anything but spy upon the poor? Ask what has he done here, and I will tell you that he has captured our Strobel, and has him bound in chains, waiting only a convenient and safe opportunity to convey him from the country to the presence of the little father* and then, Siberia, or——" and the

*Russian familiar name for the czar.

tailor drew his hand significantly across his throat.

Clara observed Paul, not the tailor, during this extravagant speech. Would Palovna, an intelligent man, free from excitement, condemn and ridicule Litizki's assertions as wild and imaginary? No; he listened gravely and gave no sign that he discredited the tailor in the least. Noticing Clara's inquiring look, Paul said:

"We Russians, Miss Hilman, are inclined to credit almost any monstrosity in the way of crime, treachery and violence to men like Alexander Poubalov. To us he stands as guilty of anything with which he is charged until he incontestably proves himself innocent."

Clara's heart sank heavily, but she that knew that she could trust Paul.

"May I tell you something?" she asked, and he followed her into the dining-room. There she hurriedly repeated the substance of Poubalov's discourse, laying especial stress upon his warning relative to distrustful Nihilists.

"It's a splendid argument," said Paul when she had finished; "I suppose you were attracted by his very frankness in admitting that he is a spy? That was a characteristic move. Mind you, I never had trouble with Poubalov; I wouldn't know him if I saw him, but I know about him. He is a very prince of spies, a past-master in the art of deceit, and many, many shrewd men have been the victims of his seeming candor. You may be sure he masks some villainy beneath his frankness, for he never was known to do a disinterested act."

"He spoke as if he were here upon some mission," suggested Clara.

"Certainly, but he wouldn't tell you what that mission was. That it had to do with Strobel is certain. I don't want to alarm you unnecessarily, Miss Hilman, but Poubalov is a most dangerous man. It may be well for us that you have faced him, though we must necessarily have discovered his presence soon, and to see him is to suspect. We at least know where to look. Litizki is an impressionable, excitable man, but he may be right, nevertheless. I am sure that you can trust him, whether or not there is anything in Poubalov's nihilistic suggestions. And as to that, I don't believe there is—not with him about. Plenty of false notions prevail about the Russian revolutionists, and it would be to Poubalov's interest to arouse dread of them in your mind. Anything to distract attention and suspicion from himself."

They returned to the front room. Litizki had recovered from his excitement, and was more like his customary, depressed self, but though he spoke quietly it was with bitter emphasis and strong conviction.

"I believe," he said, "that Poubalov instigated if he did not take part in the abduction of Mr. Strobel. I am convinced that he has him now in hiding, and the question only is whether we are to inform the police or take action ourselves."

"The police," responded Paul, "would not proceed against Poubalov on the strength of our suppositions. He would intrench himself in his official position, and insist on compliance with all forms of law; and during the delay, if, indeed, he has Strobel in his power, he would spirit him away."

"So I think," said Litizki, "and as he won't dare to remove Strobel until the interest in his disappearance dies down, unless he were openly attacked in the manner you suggest, I intend, if Miss Hilman agrees, to hunt for our friend in my own way. I shall do so to-night. I must find him."

He looked inquiringly at Clara.

"I cannot say yes or no," she replied; "you are a friend of Mr. Strobel's and you will do what you think best. Only, let me know what you find."

There was a gleam of pleasure in Litizki's eyes, followed by an expression of sullen determination as he responded:

"You shall hear from me to-morrow."

"Lou," said Clara, "I think we had better go home now. I am feeling very worn. If any of you hear the least word, I wish you would come to see me."

As she prepared to leave she took occasion to whisper to Paul:

"I do not know that I do right in encouraging Litizki. My feeling is that the more there are at work and the more various the methods, the greater is the chance of success. May I leave it to you to prevent Litizki, if possible, from any act that would be indiscreet, or worse?"

"I will do what I can," said Paul; "but he is, after all, an irresponsible agent. I am inclined to think that good will come of his investigation, whatever he does."

It was the luncheon hour when the young ladies reached home, and Mr. Pembroke had arrived before them. His face expressed painful anxiety as he greeted his niece.

"My poor child," he said, "you have heard everything, I suppose?"

"I have heard a great deal, uncle," replied Clara, "and appreciate your motives in withholding the paper from me that published the wicked rumor that Ivan had eloped, but you should have known me better. Do you suppose, uncle dear, that that rumor disturbed me? I dismiss it more lightly than anything that has been said."

"Poor child! poor child!" sighed Mr. Pembroke.

"Why do you say that?" asked Clara, sitting down wearily. "Of course, I am sorrowful; nobody can realize what I suffer; but I am confident that Ivan has done no wrong, and I cannot believe that we shall not find him. I have returned to rest, not to give up the search."

"Clara, my dear girl," said her uncle, tenderly, "you'd best give it up. You have a great sorrow to bear, but I know how brave you are. There is no occasion for further search."

"No occasion! Uncle, what do you mean?"

"The detective assigned from headquarters to make an investigation has been to see me."

"Yes, yes! what did he say?"

"The worst possible, Clara. He is convinced that Strobel went to New York, if not with Lizzie White, then to join her there. It is the only possible explanation of his disappearance."

"No! no! you know nothing about it, and the detective is a fool!" cried Clara.

Mr. Pembroke was immensely surprised at this violent outbreak, when he had expected tears, prostration, the deepest grief. It occurred to him that perhaps his niece's mind had been unsettled by her trouble. She sat looking at him with blazing eyes, her face flushed, her foot nervously patting the floor.

"You are greatly excited, Clara," ventured her uncle, gently.

"Tell me what the detective said!" retorted Clara, imperiously.

"He has found that a closed carriage, such as we know Strobel took at the corner of Park and Tremont Streets, halted at the Park Square Station shortly after that time. The passenger was a young man who answered the description of Strobel. He paid the driver, went into the station, bought a ticket for New York, and immediately took his place in the train. It is further known that Lizzie White took a train from the same station at about the same hour."

"Is that all?" asked Clara, scornfully.

"My dear girl, is it not enough?"

"It is nothing, uncle, absolutely nothing. Has your detective seen the driver of the closed carriage?"

"I don't know; I suppose so."

"I must see the detective then. No, I am not going now. After luncheon. I shall not risk failure by neglecting to care for myself. Uncle dear," and she suddenly melted and put her arms around the old gentleman's neck, "forgive me, please, if I am impatient and hasty with you. I know Ivan as you do not; I know this accusation is not true. The detective has been mistaken, and I shall show him so, and all the world besides."

Mr. Pembroke sighed sadly.

"Your loyalty, my dear," he said, "is deserving of a better subject and a better fate."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

Nothing would deter Clara from a trip to police headquarters after luncheon, and, as in the forenoon, her Cousin Louise accompanied her. As they entered the building in Pemberton Square, they met the infirm old man, Dexter, he who had arrived late at the church, he whom Clara had interrupted in conversation with Mr. Pembroke. He bowed to the young ladies with an attempt at graciousness, and reached for the shapeless, soft cap that covered his head, but he only succeeded in pulling the visor awry, and he passed them, mumbling about the weather.

"I am afraid," said Clara, "that my trouble is making me harsh toward everybody, but that old man seems to me the most disagreeable and repulsive being I ever saw. Who is he?"

"I only know that his name is Dexter," replied Louise; "he has some business with papa, I believe."

Clara inquired for the detective who had been assigned to the Strobel case, and after such delays as are naturally incident to strangers making their first call at the offices of the department, she was confronted by Mr. William Bowker, a commonplace-looking individual, who said:

"Well, ladies, what can I do for you?"

"I am Miss Hilman," replied Clara.

"Ah!" and Bowker raised his brows regretfully, "I informed your uncle this forenoon, Miss Hilman, of what I have done and found in the matter."

"He told me about it, but I couldn't be satisfied with a report at second hand. Won't you tell me just what you told him?"

"It will be very unpleasant for you, Miss Hilman, and if Mr. Pembroke has told you the result of my investigation, that is really all there is to be said."

"I won't trouble you to repeat that a gentleman answering the description of Mr. Strobel alighted from a closed carriage at the Park Square Station, shortly after the accident on Park Street and bought a ticket for New York, or that Miss White took the same train. I am willing to take it for granted that you have traced Miss White's movements correctly. I want to know what makes you so certain that the gentleman who took the train was Mr. Strobel?"

Detective Bowker stared at the young lady a moment; it was his delicate way of expressing surprise.

"The description of the man and the time tallied with Strobel and his accident," he answered, "to say nothing of the reasons for his running away."

"Is that all, Mr. Bowker?"

"No, it ain't; that was what we found at first. Don't it look reasonable——" and he proceeded to theorize on the matter until Clara checked him.

"I could have heard all that from half the people in Boston," she said, "if I had paid any attention to the rumor. I supposed professional detectives would base their reports on something better than conjecture."

Bowker shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you say," he asked with a little temper, "if an acquaintance of Strobel's was to tell you that he saw the gentleman buy his ticket and go to the train?"

"Have you such evidence as that? If so, who is it?"

"I can't answer the question, Miss Hilman. I have no right to make public the workings of the department. I expect to get further evidence this afternoon to prove that Strobel eloped. It's by no wish of mine, you understand, that I tell you these disagreeable things."

"You needn't apologize, Mr. Bowker. I came for information. I understand, then, that you do not regard your investigation as finished."

"Well, not exactly. Of course we want to clinch it."

"Have you seen the driver of the closed carriage?"

"No. We have no means of identifying him except recognition by the man who drove the coupe. If a man should walk in here and say that he drove the closed carriage, we'd examine him, of course, but we've been unable yet to find that man. The thing being in the papers, it may happen—in fact, it's quite likely—that the missing driver will turn up to-day. Cabmen are usually anxious to please the department. I suppose the evidence of the cabman would be satisfactory, wouldn't it?"

"Quite, if I was satisfied that it was the man, and that he told the truth."

"I guess you're hard to satisfy, Miss Hilman."

"Mr. Bowker," and Clara beamed on him with a smile so sweet and radiant that he started with astonishment, "I think you are working hard and as faithfully as you know how to prove a theory which you formed early in your investigations, even before you had Lizzie White's flight to base it on. I shouldn't think you'd do that, you know. Honestly, wouldn't you rather find out the truth, even if it did upset your first theory?"

Bowker stared in undisguised discomfort.

"If you've got any facts," he said, "you'd ought to let us have them. Of course we want to find out the truth. What is it you know, or think of?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Bowker," responded Clara, rising, and still bewildering him with her lovely smiles; "you work along in your way and I'll work in mine. When I learn that you've found anything worth considering, I may take you into my confidence; I might even co-operate with you. Good-afternoon."

No one was more amazed at Clara's coolness than her Cousin Louise.

"I don't see how you can do it, Clara," she said when they were again in Pemberton Square.

"Do you realize," returned Clara, "what might happen if I didn't do something of this kind? Somebody must

stir everybody else up, or else the public will not only come to believe that Ivan was false, but we shall never find him. I may be making mistakes, but I don't believe that detective will be content to stop where he is. He'll look further, and the further he looks the more certainly will he find that he has been working at a wrong theory. Let's go somewhere and find a business directory."

They went to the parlor of a neighboring hotel, where for an hour Clara busied herself making a list of all the livery and hack stables in the city. Then she hired a cab, and for hours the young ladies went from one to another stable, Clara always with the same inquiry, seeking for some trace of him whom for convenience she came to call the "second driver."

There is no need to go into the details of her tedious search. It was not concluded when evening came, and she had to desist from sheer fatigue. She had found no clew that promised the discovery of the one witness who could certainly be of use to her.

From Mrs. White's Litizki went to his shop and toiled patiently and methodically for two or three hours. He hardly opened his lips during the whole time, but his brain was busy with projects. That Poubalov was responsible for the fate of Ivan Strobel did not admit of a shadow of doubt; that he had concealed the young man in his lodgings was not so certain, but Litizki deemed it altogether probable. The spy would have plenty of money, he could have put up at a hotel; why had he not done so? Because, according to Litizki's reasoning, he had uses for a lodging to which the public conveniences of a hotel could not safely be bent. Distrustful of all men, the spy would keep his prisoner under his own charge, and in a lodging-house it would not be difficult to purchase the discreet silence of a not too scrupulous landlady concerning a mysterious co-tenant.

The more he thought about it the more firmly the idea took possession of the tailor that Strobel was confined in the Bulfinch Place lodging-house which Poubalov had en-

tered by means of a latch-key. If any one had suggested to him the spy's arguments to the effect that as the agent of a friendly government he could not venture, if he would, to violate American law, Litizki would have laughed, and that would have been very significant of his immeasurable contempt for the argument, for it was not in the memory of his associates that the tailor had ever smiled. His nearest approach to it, in fact, was when he manifested pleasure at the idea of being countenanced in an investigation of Poubalov's doings in his own way. Respect American law, indeed! Then would Poubalov be other than he was, and the leopard might be expected to change his spots.

Litizki hated Poubalov with all the concentrated venom of his small nature, a nature that had known little of good in the world save in Ivan Strobel's kindness, that had felt the blows of tyranny and the stabs of treachery at the hands of this same spy. A desire for vengeance had smoldered long in his heart, and he had never expected that any breeze of fortune would fan it into living flame; and now, suddenly, it had burst forth a raging fire, and the possibility of opportunity rose before his dull eyes as the one glad hope of his wretched life. Poubalov in America! Poubalov at his treacherous work against the one man who had inspired Litizki with confidence and stirred his affections! and he, Litizki, knew Poubalov's secret, knew where he could lay hands upon him! Fate must have placed him there in order that Litizki's vengeance might be the more complete.

The tailor laid down his tools and bent his head upon his hands. Poubalov must be checkmated, Strobel rescued; and if in accomplishing this end, the spy should be—Well, what then?

Litizki put on a long coat with a high collar that he turned up about his ears, and a soft hat that he pulled down over his eyes. At the foot of the stairs that led to his shop he met Paul Palovna.

"Hello, Litizki," exclaimed the young man, "where in

the world are you going rigged out as if it were winter?"

The grotesque little figure looked sourly up at the inquirer and replied:

"I am going to begin my work."

"See here, Litizki," said Paul, seriously, "you mustn't do anything rash. I was just coming to see you to give you warning. Poubalov is dangerous and very clever. Don't get yourself into trouble, and don't spoil all chance of trapping him, if he has really got hold of Strobel, by any premature act."

The little tailor reflected.

"For myself," he answered presently, "nothing matters. I will be careful, Paul Palovna, as careful as man can be not to compromise any chances. I shall act for myself alone. Nobody sends me, nobody influences me. If I succeed, we shall all rejoice; if I fail"—he shrugged his shoulders significantly—"I will be the only loser. I promise you not to be rash, Paul Palovna, for the sake of noble Ivan Strobel and his beautiful lady."

Then he moved away, and Palovna knew hardly whether to smile at his ludicrous make-up, or shudder at the purpose that unquestionably lurked in his thoughts.

"I hope good may come of it!" sighed Palovna.

Litizki went to Bulfinch Place, and shrinking as far as possible into his long coat, walked along on the sidewalk opposite Poubalov's house. Yes, there the villain was, calmly reading a newspaper! One flight from the ground, front room. At the side of the room was a smaller one over the hall. Litizki knew the arrangement of the houses in that vicinity, and the blinds of that room were closed. Perhaps, though, the prison chamber would be in some more remote part of the house. Time and the night would tell.

The tailor went to the corner of Bowdoin Street, and stood there, unmindful of the curious glances of passers until he saw Poubalov leave the lodging-house. It was just possible that the spy had his prisoner concealed elsewhere, and was now going to him. Litizki followed. It oc-

curred to him that now might be the time to get into the house on some pretext and make a search, but he dismissed the thought as ruinous. If Strobel were there, the landlady would be paid to be watchful during Poubalov's absence. No; the night was the time when nobody would be watching, and when every corner in the house could be searched from cellar to garret.

Poubalov went to State Street, and entered the bank where Strobel had been employed. He brushed past Litizki when he emerged, but apparently did not see him. The tailor followed him from one place to another, waited under a hotel window for an hour while the spy was dining, saw him into a theatre and eventually back to his lodgings, where he arrived at about eleven o'clock. It was evident that he went directly to bed, for the light in his room was extinguished very shortly after he went in.

Litizki then went to a cheap restaurant, where he appeased his appetite and drank several cups of bad tea. It was after midnight before he left the place, and his one wish was that he had a dark lantern. To make up for his lack, he was plentifully supplied with matches.

A printer, whom Litizki knew by sight, lived in the house adjoining the one where Poubalov lodged. The tailor knew that he ordinarily arrived home at one o'clock. He was on time this night, and as he turned into the tiny yard before the building, Litizki stepped down from the doorway.

"I'm glad you've come," he said, "I left my key in the room and I can't rouse anybody by ringing."

"No," responded the printer with a laugh, "they don't get up for anybody. How long you been living here?"

"Only a few days."

The door was opened, and both men went upstairs. The printer, with a cheery "good-night," entered a room on the second landing. Litizki continued to the top floor, and thence through a skylight to the roof. Fortune was, indeed, favoring him. He had supposed the skylight would be raised for the sake of ventilation. There had been

doubt whether the steps leading to it would be in place.

He cared little whether the skylight on the adjoining roof would be found open and the steps in place, or not; he would get in in any event. Both were in just the condition most favorable to his project, and a moment later Litizki had struck a match and was peering about in an empty room on the top floor of Poubalov's lodging house.

The little tailor exulted more and more as he crept down the stairs after examining every room. Not a sleeper had been awakened, not a door had been found locked. He would search the whole house before trying the door to the hall room adjoining Poubalov's. That would be found locked. He had no doubt he should pick the lock, for he had skeleton keys in his pocket, and if not—a vigorous shove and he would burst it open. What cared he for details at the very end of his search?

He had come to the floor above the spy's room. Here, as before, every door was unlocked, most of the rooms empty. He had just extinguished a match preparatory to descending further, when from somewhere out of the darkness heavy hands were laid upon him and he was borne to the floor. Another instant and a hand was pressed upon his mouth and there was a dazzling flash of light from a dark lantern held over him.

Litizki saw the cruel eyes of Alexander Poubalov glaring down, and then the slide of the lantern was closed again.

CHAPTER IX.

LITIZKI'S LESSON.

There had been no scuffle and almost no noise as the tailor fell to the floor, but one of the chamber doors opened, nevertheless, and a startled voice asked: "What's that?"

"Sorry you've been disturbed," said Poubalov; "a friend of mine, with a little more of a load than he could manage, has stumbled. That's all. I will look out for him."

The inquirer went back to bed grumbling, and as soon as the door closed Poubalov whispered in Russian: "Will you keep quiet, or shall I have to quiet you?" and he removed his hand from Litizki's mouth.

"It's all one to me, Alexander Poubalov," muttered the tailor, and, feeling the pressure removed, he rose to his feet. Still speaking Russian, the spy remarked:

"You are so good at finding your way in the dark that I will not pull the slide of my lantern. I should dislike, for your sake, to have you recognized. Go down and enter my room."

Litizki felt for the banister, and, guided by it, walked down the flight and opened the door, as directed, into his captor's room. When Poubalov came in he closed and bolted the door, then opened the lantern and let its rays fall on Litizki from head to feet, and head again, as if he were curiously studying the make-up. He laughed softly at last and said:

"There's a chair just back of you. Sit down."

The tailor sank into it, and Poubalov lit the gas. In the general light Litizki saw that the spy was fully dressed save for his coat, and that the folding bed which was a

feature of the furniture had not been let down. Poubalov noticed Litizki's glance and understood:

"No, my friend," he said suavely, "I did not go to bed. I expected you, and sat up to receive you."

Litizki groaned. Until then he had hoped desperately that even as a prisoner he would be able to accomplish something; now, convinced that the spy had prepared for his coming, he realized that his effort had been in vain. The awful sense of the unshakable power this man represented and wielded came over him as it did in those gloomy days in Russia when he had to choose between voluntary exile and certain banishment.

Poubalov drew a chair to a little table in the middle of the room, and sat down opposite the tailor.

"Nicholas Litizki," he said, "you have surprised and grieved me! I would not have supposed that even a residence of several years in America could have made you forget that Alexander Poubalov never takes a step until he is thoroughly prepared for it. I, who hardly know what the word emotion means, am almost hurt. Surely it must be that contact with republican institutions deadens a man's sensibilities and affects his memory."

Litizki's small eyes had been fixed upon those of his adversary from the beginning. They had relapsed to their customary dull expression, but they glowed faintly with new life, for, the first edge of his disappointment dulled, he recalled the two great purposes for which he had invaded the house: vengeance and the rescue of Ivan Strobél. Neither purpose might be lost, and if he must forego or postpone vengeance, he would not prejudice what means others might have at command for saving his benefactor.

"Poubalov," said the tailor, "I am an American citizen."

"I bow to your discretion," responded the spy, "but I knew it. You think to hide behind the generous skirts of your adopted country's goddess. Good! I admit the efficacy of the refuge, for the accredited agent of the czar—

whom God preserve, Nicholas Litizki—will do nothing in a friendly country in violation of that country's laws. But see, my friend, what a tower of strength a proper respect for the law becomes: I not only knew you were coming, but I knew what you were coming for, and I need not say that I knew what way you would take. I have kept within the law, and yet I found out all about you and your associates before I had been in Boston—no matter how long. Poor fellow! did you really think that Poubalov's eyes did not penetrate your flimsy disguise? I am sorry, Litizki; your patience and devotion would fit you for service in the holy cause of the czar, and it is not at all adapted to pursuing the steps of honest men."

"You do not frighten me," interposed Litizki; "I know your superlative cunning and your crooked ways. Your speech nauseates me. 'Honest men!' Bah!"

"We won't dispute over trifles, then. I simply call to your attention the fact that you unlawfully invade a dwelling-house, prowling about like a common thief and thus place yourself unreservedly in my power. Of course, Nicholas Litizki did not enter here to commit theft. He came to find his friend, Ivan Strobel."

"It is a lie, Alexander Poubavol! I sought him not."

"You know whether it is a lie, or not. So do I. Therefore we will not argue the matter. Well, what are you going to do now that you are here?"

Litizki boiled with futile rage. He was trapped not only literally as Poubalov's prisoner, but he felt how weak he was in any contest of words with this shrewd master of deceit. He had spoken truly in telling Paul Pavlovna that it mattered not what became of him, and although those words were uttered under the influence of a desire for vengeance that constant dwelling upon had turned to conviction that he would succeed, he now felt them to be as true, for he despaired, as he had been despairing for years, of accomplishing anything that would be worth the doing. Why had he presumed to undertake the hopeless task of outwitting Poubalov? He saw how

wildly foolish had been his course, but his conviction remained unshaken.

"Have it so, then," he hissed; "respect for law is not in your character. You have unlawfully taken possession of Ivan Strobel."

"Yes?" responded Poubalov quietly; "you are very sure of that?"

"I know it, yes; I did come here to find him, to liberate, ay, to kill you if need be!"

"Indeed! the same, familiar antagonism to the authority of Russia, I suppose. The Russian agent is to you like the red flag to the bull. Yes, very interesting. Well, Litizki?"

"Alexander Poubalov!" exclaimed the tailor, rising and speaking with all his long-treasured bitterness, "you have Ivan Strobel, an American citizen, in your power; you restrain him illegally of his liberty, with what purpose it matters not. I, as an American citizen, demand that you release him."

Poubalov looked with mock admiration at the fierce but grotesque figure before him, and said:

"Good! very good! I am not certain but that demand is good law. I shall have to think of it. When, Nicholas Litizki?"

"I cannot tolerate your smart language," returned Litizki; "give him up now. It will be worse for you if you fool with me. You threw me down in the dark because I was taken unawares. In the light I can make my own fight, Alexander Poubalov! Come! Ivan Strobel is in that room, behind that door, and if you have not stopped his ears as you have gagged his mouth and bound his limbs, he hears my voice now and knows it. I should be less than man should I not take even a desperate step to rescue him, my friend, my benefactor!"

Even to the cynical spy the grotesqueness of the little tailor's figure and make-up disappeared in the exaltation up to which his emotions bore him. He took one determined stride toward the door to the little hall room.

"Nicholas Litizki," said Poubalov, softly.

The tailor turned, such was the compelling power of that deep voice, and for the instant his progress was checked. Poubalov had extended one arm upon the table and his hand was toying with a revolver.

"I believe you, my friend," remarked the spy, hardly looking toward the tailor at first, but later concentrating his gleaming eyes upon him, "I believe you when you say by actions if not by words that you would die for your friend, and that you do not care what becomes of you. But you have some degree of cleverness, Litizki. We learned that years ago. Listen, then, just a moment before you lay hand upon that door. It is locked, Litizki. Before you could open it I could put a bullet through your heart. Would I not dare? What should a peaceable lodger not do to a man who stealthily enters his house by night? Who would disbelieve me if I should calmly report to the police that you came as a burglar, and that I shot at you in protection of property and life? Suppose, however, that I prefer to avoid a disturbance. Before you could more than wrench the knob of that door once, I could pierce your heart silently."

Poubalov rose and stood towering over Litizki, a knife glistening in his right hand.

"You know something of my resources," he continued, "and whether I would be likely to find difficulty in disposing of your lifeless body. Why! you have come so secretly that you and I alone know of your whereabouts. We would then have another disappearance to add to the Strobel mystery, but one that would not be half as interesting, Litizki, not half."

"You have killed Ivan Strobel!" whispered Litizki, shrinking away.

"In that inference," said Poubalov, contemptuously, as he laid his weapons on the table and resumed his seat, "your madness reaches its climax and you will speedily recover. You will not go to that door now. You see how useless it would be. Live, and you may yet see your

friend, may yet assist in liberating him. Understand me, Nicholas Litizki: I have not come to this country for nothing. I have a mission to perform, and nothing shall prevent me from performing it, and in my own way."

"You will then keep Strobel a prisoner," muttered Litizki, "until you have wrung from him by cruelty what you have come for?"

"I shall perform my mission. Now it would be perfectly easy for me to remove you, for you are making yourself an obstacle, a slight one, to my plans. It pleases me better, however, that you should live, and you may yet be an assistance to me. I will show you to the street door whenever you feel ready to depart."

Litizki shot a glance full of evil at his captor, but Poubalov ignored it, and calmly lighted the inevitable cigarette.

"Very well, Alexander Poubalov," said Litizki after a moment, "you may let me go, but expect no gratitude from me. I know only too well that you think to serve your foul purposes by my liberty, but, weak as I am, I shall not rest until Strobel is restored to us or his fate made known, and even after that I shall pursue you! You teach me a lesson, Poubalov, a hard one, but I shall learn it."

"I hope you will. Life will be easier if you do. Must you go now? Permit me," and with a fine pretense at courtesy he unbolted the door and accompanied Litizki to the street door, which he also opened.

"Good-night, Nicholas Litizki," he whispered as he withdrew again into the house.

It was Litizki's purpose to go at once to the house where Paul Palovna lodged, rouse him, and tell him his experience, with all the admissions that Poubalov had seemed to make, and all the inferences that were to be drawn from his remarks and innuendoes; but as he hurried along in the cool night air he felt as if something were leaving him. He slackened his pace, halted irresolutely, went on a few steps, and at last leaned heavily against a building

and struck his hand angrily against his brow, muttering:
"Fool, fool!"

What was this sense of loss but a relief from the dominating influence of Poubalov's stronger personality? There, with all his desperation, even at the height of his exaltation, when he seemed to tread the border lands of heroism, he had halted at a single word from the spy. He had stood and listened to threats and sophistry, and had been moved by the one and convinced by the other.

No! he could not tell all this to Palovna, or to any other person except Strobel; to him, if he should ever return, he would make a full confession of his defeat. For the present he must keep it to himself, and if he would still do something to effect his vengeance and rescue Strobel, he must work in secret. And as he reflected that it was just this course that Poubalov undoubtedly expected him to take, he groaned and slunk abashed and mortified to his lonely room.

In the early morning, without waiting to read newspapers, or submit to interviews from reporters, should they call again at the house, Clara and Louise set forth to finish their search for the "second driver." Again they had a tedious, fruitless experience. Now and again it seemed momentarily as if they had come upon a clue to the man, but Clara's keen questions invariably brought them to the same disappointing end. By noon they had visited every livery stable in Boston.

"Don't think me unkind, Clara," ventured Louise, "but I fear we ought to give this up. I don't know that I can say just why, for I sympathize with you as deeply as ever, and, like you, I believe in Ivan; but somehow I fear."

"There are the stables in Cambridge and Somerville," responded Clara, absently; "we haven't been there. Forgive me, dear! I didn't mean to ignore what you said. We are both tired. I had meant to call at Mrs. White's before returning, but we will go home and rest, and see if fresh thinking will help us. There may be some word at home by this time."

There was, indeed, some word at home. The servant reported that Detective Bowker had called and would be glad to see Miss Hilman, should she care to go downtown during this afternoon; and there were many letters from friends who had learned of her trouble. All except one were more or less sympathetic, but in more than one there was a veiled remonstrance against her taking such a vigorous and public part in the case.

The exception was unsigned and without date. It read:

"If Miss Hilman insists on being convinced with her own eyes, that her 'lover' has been false, if she needs more proof to cause her to withdraw from the ridiculous attitude she has assumed, why doesn't she go to New York and find Lizzie White? The writer is certain that she would return fully satisfied."

CHAPTER X.

CORROBORATIVE DETAIL.

Clara had not come sufficiently in contact with the evil side of human nature to ignore an anonymous letter. She felt all the contempt for the writer that he or she deserved, and she spurned the suggestion contained in the letter as utterly unworthy of a moment's attention. Yet the sting was there. She might ignore the letter to all appearances, and yet not be able to forget it. The cruelty of the writer was what she felt, not the force of the blow.

"I cannot understand," she said, laying the letter down and taking a newspaper, "how a person can go out of his way for the sole purpose of doing an unkind thing."

"What is it, dear?" asked Louise, stopping on her way out of the room.

Clara started to show her the letter, but, overcome by a sense of repugnance for it, answered:

"Let it pass until after luncheon. We shall have a great deal to talk of then."

So Clara was left alone with the newspapers, and she read them with amazement and consternation. At the very first there was a little relief at finding no flaring headlines on the first page, for she had no enjoyment in the notoriety that the case thrust upon her. She bore it simply as one of the unavoidable features of the situation. As she searched the first paper, the relief vanished, and in its place came a growing wonder. The reports of the abandoned wedding had been set forth in complete detail with every expansion that fertile brains could suggest, as if every city editor had said to his reporter, "We'll stand all you can write." It had been the important news feature of the day, and to Clara it had seemed

as if every newspaper in the city had undertaken to solve the mystery. Where, then, was the long account of the second day's developments?

Tucked obscurely away in the middle of a page devoted to a miscellaneous assortment of news, she found at last a few paragraphs setting forth the conclusions of the detective bureau, that there was no financial irregularity to be attributed to Mr. Strobel, and that the missing man had undoubtedly eloped with Lizzie White. Miss Hilman's health was reported to be good, and it was noted that she had taken a personal hand in the investigation with every appearance of confidence in the loyalty of her betrothed.

Clara found longer reports in the other papers, and the one that had published the first intimation of the elopement, continued to make it the sensation of the hour, but it was a labored effort, devoted quite as much to exploiting its own enterprise in beating the other papers as to setting forth the news.

So, then, the community, of which the newspapers were the reflection, had contentedly accepted the first solution that offered, and all her work had gone for nothing, worse than nothing, for she found herself pictured as a pitiable victim to her lover's faithlessness. The very fact that the reporters refrained from bringing out the picture of her misery in strong colors was evidence of the sincerity with which they wrote. They were satisfied that Ivan had eloped! To tell how loyally she had clung to him would be to put her in a ridiculous light before all readers.

The tears that came to Clara's eyes were angrily dashed away at first, but they would flow, and after a moment she gave full vent to them. Her experience was one that comes only to those who have to suffer such great calamities that for the time all life seems to be centered upon them, and the awaking to the cold fact that all life runs along just as before, and the great calamity speedily becomes an event of yesterday, is almost as hard to bear as the original shock. This awakening with Clara was coin-

cident to a fresh determination to continue her search. The world might laugh if it chose to be so cruel; she believed in her lover and would yet find him.

The bell had rung for luncheon, and drying her eyes, Clara went into the dining room. Her uncle was already at the table. His greeting was constrained but not lacking in affection and sympathy.

"Don't you think it would be better, Clara," he said gently after they had exchanged a few words, "to withdraw for a while from public view? I am afraid you are doing no good, and I will not conceal from you that I regard your loyal search as hopeless. I am getting to be an old man, and I have seen a great deal of the world, as we reckon it by the human beings who populate it. This blow that has fallen upon you has fallen on others before your time, and it will fall again. This that seems to you incredible has been no less incredible in the past——"

"Stop, please, uncle," interrupted Clara; "I cannot draw comparisons, and if I could they would be valueless. I must judge my affair by its own circumstances alone. I believe Ivan has done no wrong, and it is nothing less than my duty to him and myself to right the wrong that has been done to him."

"But tell me, my dear child, is there anything in the situation that promises a solution other than that found by the detectives and the reporters?"

"Yes, uncle, there is," replied Clara in a low tone, "and I am glad the reporters have not found the clew, and I am not sorry that Mr. Bowker missed it, too. I will tell you about it."

"Papa," said Louise, coming into the room at this moment, "Mr. Dexter has called. I was coming downstairs when the bell rang, and I answered it. I showed him into the library."

"I wish he would confine his calls to the office," exclaimed Mr. Pembroke, impatiently. "You will have to excuse me, though, for I am obliged to see him."

"I am afraid papa is having a serious time with his business," said Louise, after he had gone.

"Everything comes at once, doesn't it?" responded Clara; "I am so sorry! He wants me to give up trying to find Ivan, dear. It hurts me to displease uncle, but what would you do? I think he would like to have me go away for a time."

"Oh, I don't think that! I am sure he feels toward you as if you were his own daughter."

"I am sure he does, Lou. A father couldn't be more affectionate and kind; but in this matter, how can I yield to his wishes? He does not know."

"Do you mean about Mr. Poubalov?"

"Partly, but I had more in mind that no one could know Ivan's character as well as I do."

Louise thought of her own budding love. If Ralph Harmon were under suspicion, could she fail to defend him? Could she think of him as other than honorable and faithful?

A servant passed through the room, and left the door in the hall carelessly ajar. Neither of the young ladies noticed it.

"Clara," said Louise, "I should try to do just as you are doing, but I know I could not be so brave. I think if you should tell uncle about Mr. Poubalov it might make him feel better."

"I intend to do so," replied Clara, "and would have done so last evening if he had been at home."

They were interrupted by Mr. Pembroke's voice. He had stepped from the library into the hall, and was speaking with ill-suppressed anger.

"I won't listen to anything you have to say on the matter," he said, "and I will ask you to confine your talks to me to business matters; and when you must see me, go to the office."

"Ugh!" grunted old Dexter in reply, "she'll make you as ridiculous as she makes herself."

"Dexter," exclaimed Mr. Pembroke, "I think you're the worst villain unhung!"

"H'm, h'm, h'm," muttered Dexter, "you're a fool, Mat Pembroke. I think you're a fool!"

The front door closed loudly and Mr. Pembroke strode into the dining-room, where the young ladies were looking at each other with astonished eyes. Mr. Pembroke was flushed, and he bit his lip with added vexation as he noticed that his daughter and niece had heard the last words of his conversation with Dexter.

"I am sorry——" he began, his voice still shaking with anger. He did not complete his remark, but sat down and tried to eat.

After a moment Clara rose and put her arms softly about his neck.

"I am sorry, too, uncle dear," she said, "that you have so much trouble about me. Of course that vile man was speaking of me."

Mr. Pembroke shuddered violently at her first touch. He released her arms abruptly and stood up.

"No, don't!" he said with an expression of the deepest pain; "you continue your search in your own way, child. Don't mind about me or anybody else, least of all that—that meddlesome Dexter."

"I was going to tell you some of the information I learned yesterday, uncle."

"No, no! no, no! I don't want to hear it—that is, not now. Forgive me, child; I am disturbed by business matters and cannot attend to it now. This evening if you like. Good-by."

He hastened from the room, more agitated than when he had come in.

"It's a shame," said Clara, bitterly, "that any one who is in trouble has to annoy all those who are near to her."

"I wouldn't think of it that way, dear," responded Louise; "papa is as sympathetic as can be, and I am sure that when he gets over his anger at this Mr. Dexter's interference, there will be nothing to regret. He said him-

self, you know, that he would talk with you this evening."

"I hope I shall have something definite to tell him then," said Clara. "Will you go downtown with me again this afternoon?"

Of course she would, and in due time, therefore, the young ladies were again at police headquarters. Detective Bowker was evidently highly pleased with himself, although he manfully tried to suppress any signs of triumph.

"I called at your house this forenoon, Miss Hilman," he said, "to inform you that the driver of the closed carriage has been found."

"What does he say?" asked Clara eagerly.

"He corroborates what I told you yesterday."

"Does he say that he drove Mr. Strobel to the Park Square Station?"

"Yes, just as I told you."

"Can I see him?"

"I have no doubt you will be able to do so. He is not here now. He has gone about his work, but I can have him here at any time, or he will call on you. He suggested that himself when I told him that you would be pretty likely to doubt his story."

"I should like to see him," said Clara, her voice faint and tremulous in spite of herself. "When did you find him, Mr. Bowker?"

"Well, as to that," replied the detective, reluctantly, "Billings came in here early this morning. You know I said that might happen."

"Yes. What stable does he drive for?"

"What stable?" echoed Bowker with his stare of surprise; "why should you ask that, Miss Hilman?"

"Because I have visited every stable in Boston to find whether any employee could have been driving a closed carriage along Park Street at the hour when the wheel of Mr. Strobel's coupé came off."

"Whew! you did mean business, didn't you?" exclaimed Bowker with evident admiration. "It's a pity you

had such a time of it. Billings drove his own carriage. He wasn't connected with any of the stables."

"I am glad to know that my search did not fail through any lack of thorough inquiry," said Clara, and she felt her courage reviving. "Will you send word to this Mr. Billings that I would like to see him?"

"Certainly. When shall I tell him to call?"

"Any time this evening. And, Mr. Bowker, can you not give me the name of the man who said he saw Mr. Strobel buy a ticket for New York?"

"I cannot do so. The fact is, we haven't the name. I expected to get it, honestly I did, for I heard that Strobel was recognized in the station by a friend; but that friend hasn't turned up; and, to tell you the plain truth, we don't think it necessary to inquire for him."

"It seems to me——" began Clara, stopping and reflecting. She was going to protest against the imperfect character of the investigation, but she thought better of it. This detective unquestionably had no interest to find other than the truth, and with his low conceptions of character, due doubtless to his frequent contact with criminals, it would be but natural for him to see no other explanation for Ivan's disappearance than the one to substantiate which he had obtained a certain amount of evidence. If even her good uncle were disposed to view the idea of the elopement as a possibility, nay, as a probability, what better could be expected of one to whom Ivan was merely a man like other men? And the evidence of the "second driver" which was undoubtedly straightforward—— Perhaps Ivan had gone to New York. How could she tell? Not with Lizzie White, of course, but—— She would talk with the driver.

"I shall be greatly obliged," she concluded, "if you will send me word should any new development turn up. I don't suppose I can expect you to pay any further attention to the case."

"We may hear from New York at any time," replied

Bowker; "the police there are on the lookout for Strobel, and if we hear anything I will let you know."

Louise tucked her arm affectionately within Clara's, and asked:

"Where now, dear?"

"We will go to Mrs. White's," responded Clara, drearily. Her faith was yet undisturbed, but the mystery seemed the darker, for if the wily Russian had had to do with Ivan's departure, how much harder it would be to find him in New York than in Boston! Then, had he gone voluntarily, might it not be possible that he did not wish her to search for him? Surely he would write if he could. With that thought, and a renewed conviction that Ivan was somehow constrained of his liberty, she arrived at Mrs. White's house.

"I'm so glad to see you," cried the landlady, "with all this talk in the papers. I have heard from Lizzie. See! Here is the letter."

She handed a sheet of paper to Clara. It was not a long letter, but what little there was was rambling in style. It was dated from Second Avenue, New York, and stated that the writer had found a new home.

"I should be happy," she wrote, "if it wasn't for the way I had to go. But there wasn't any other way. After a while I shall tell you all about it."

Clara's quick perceptions told her that any person with the elopement explanation in his head would see a significance in these words that could not fail to reflect unfavorably upon Ivan.

"Mrs. White," she said tremulously, "you won't show this letter to reporters, or detectives, or anybody else, will you?"

I Hate you
signed W C

you are a
bad person

CHAPTER XI.

STRANGE EXIT OF POUBALOV.

"I had already shown it to Mr. Bowker," replied Mrs. White, anxiously; "I thought it might convince him that Lizzie had nothing to do with the disappearance of Mr. Strobel."

"It didn't convince him," said Clara, bitterly; "but no matter. May I copy Miss Lizzie's address?"

"Of course. Are you going to write to her?"

"Perhaps so. Have you written yet?"

"I haven't had time, but I shall do so this afternoon. Is there something you would like to have me say?"

Clara was intent with her thoughts.

"Mrs. White," she said presently, "if you write to-night, could you omit any reference to Mr. Strobel?"

"Land sakes!" exclaimed the good lady; "whatever should I write about then? With Lizzie's name in the papers, and everybody believing that she ran away with Mr. Strobel, what should I say?"

"I suppose it would be hard to ignore it altogether, but couldn't you omit saying anything of the rumors that have connected their names?"

"Why, I'll try to, Miss Hilman, but Lizzie will have to know about it some time."

"Certainly, when you write to-morrow you can say what you please about it. Just for to-day I wish you wouldn't. I'll come down early to-morrow morning, and perhaps I will be able to tell you a great deal more than you know now, more than any of us know."

"I do hope you will hear something definite," said Mrs. White, "for you can't tell how much easier I am to know that Lizzie's settled somewhere, that she's alive and in a

home. If you only knew that Mr. Strobel was sick in a hospital, now, it would be better, wouldn't it?"

"Nothing is so dreadful as uncertainty," replied Clara: "you'll be very careful what you write then?"

"As for that, Miss Hilman, I don't see that I need to write at all to-day. It's only a day more, and if you say it won't make any difference to you what I say to-morrow, I'll put it off till then if you like."

"I should be so much obliged! Have you seen Mr. Litizki to-day?"

"No, nor the dark gentleman, either. Mr. Litizki's shop is not far from here, if you'd like to see him."

Clara inquired the way, and soon after the young ladies set out for the little tailor's place of business.

Litizki was his own master in business, and he employed two or more fellow-countrymen as assistants, the number varying with the demands of his enterprise. On this day there were several men in the shop, but they were not there as workmen. Most of them had come to talk with Litizki about the Strobel case. He was not very communicative, but that was his way. Nevertheless he had some things to say, and for this reason his acquaintances found that he talked much more freely than usual.

"I tell you," he insisted, his dull eyes glowing with hate, "Alexander Poubalov is in Boston. I am not one to be mistaken in that man, and his presence here means trouble for any, perhaps all of us."

"What could he wish to do against poor Russians, Nicholas Litizki, who have no intention of revisiting their native country?" asked one of the group.

"Better ask what has he done?" retorted the tailor. "Here is Ivan Strobel, more prosperous than we, with more powerful friends, and what has Poubalov done to him? Would that I knew!"

"As soon as Poubalov appears," remarked another, "Litizki will lay the very next crime that occurs to his hands."

"Where Poubalov goes," said Litizki, "you will ever

find treachery and oppression. It is not for you, Peter, to make light of Poubalov. You have felt his hand as well as I."

"Yes," admitted Peter, "but in the Strobel matter you do not forget what the police have discovered, do you? Well might you suspect the dirty spy, were it not that one does not go far, it seems, to find the woman in the case."

"Bah!" sneered Litizki; do you forget that there are two women in the case? And have you seen either of them? No. Well, I have seen both. I have no unkind word for Lizzie White, with whom they say he went away; but I tell you, friends, Ivan Strobel could not have preferred her to Miss Hilman." He pronounced the name softly as if it aroused a feeling akin to reverence. "You should see her," he continued; "she is a very angel of beauty and goodness. Happy would be the man whose privilege it was simply to worship her; and as for him whom she would permit to love her— Bah! talk to me not about the woman in the case until you have seen Miss Hilman."

His friends listened gravely. They found nothing ludicrous in Litizki's occasionally extravagant language. When he was stirred to something like eloquence, it was almost always by a memory of the wrongs he had suffered, and then no language could have been too imaginative to express the bitterness with which his sympathetic hearers listened.

"Where did you see her, Litizki?" asked one of them.

"Never mind now," he replied; "I have seen her since Strobel disappeared. She is bearing up bravely, and scorns the suggestion that he eloped with Miss White. She is devoting her life to finding him, and it is my opinion that every poor Russian in Boston ought to do the same."

He looked furtively from face to face in the group, to observe the effect of his words. Most of them stared at the floor.

"Strobel was a good man," said one, after a long pause; "but what could any of us do?"

"Do?" repeated the tailor, and his indignant reply died

on his lips as he remembered with sudden distinctness the fiasco of the previous night. "We could at least watch Poubalov, and I, for one, intend to do so. I cannot sit, and cut, and sew, and think, while he is in this country and my friend is in his power."

"Nicholas Litizki," said one who had not spoken previously, "if I were in your place, I would let the Strobel case take care of itself."

The tailor glanced at the speaker.

"You speak as if we were still in Russia," he said, "and you had authority to command me."

"You will do as you please," returned the other; "but if I were in your place, I should keep quiet."

"Listen then, all of you," exclaimed Litizki, with energy; "I shall not keep quiet. I shall pursue Poubalov, I shall do everything possible to effect the rescue of Ivan Strobel, and if I have to sacrifice my business and everything, and every chance I have in the world, I shall do it."

The door of the little workshop opened, and Alexander Poubalov stepped in.

"Good-day, to you, Nicholas Litizki, and friends," he said with easy familiarity. "When one is in a foreign land, and has need of something, he will naturally apply to a fellow-countryman, will he not?"

He looked around at the group, as if expecting a general assent. The men looked darkly at him and were silent. If all had not seen him in Russia, they knew who he was; and if there had been any doubt, they would have but needed to glance at Litizki to see that he was facing his arch-enemy.

The tailor rose from his bench, and his sallow face was deathly pale.

"Alexander Poubalov," he said determinedly, "this is no place for you. You hear no words of welcome——"

"Gently, Litizki, my friend, gently," interposed the spy; "I call simply on business. I want clothes. Will you make them for me?"

"Not for all the wealth of the czar!" returned the tailor, fiercely.

"Then we will waste no time discussing material and prices. Good-day again," and Poubalov walked grandly out.

The group exchanged inquiring glances in silence for a moment, and then Litizki exclaimed:

"You see, friends! you see! I was not mistaken in the man, and he is the same here as in Russia—the spy who goes everywhere and does nothing. I don't need to tell you that he wanted no garments. He came here for a purpose, and he accomplished it. It is now my turn, Vargovitch, to utter a warning. Poubalov's eyes are upon you, and if I were you— Bah!"

Litizki had begun to imitate the serious tone in which his friend had warned him to let the Strobel case alone, but it seemed superfluous to suggest a warning to Vargovitch after he had himself seen the spy.

"Yes, I understand," said Vargovitch, "and I simply repeat that you'd better keep out of the Strobel case."

"Vargovitch," cried Litizki, "you do not talk like a loyal Russian. Is it you who would stand by and let this spy work his will among us?"

"I have no more love for Poubalov and his work than you have, Litizki," replied Vargovitch. "May there not be reasons for my counsel—reasons that you do not understand?"

Litizki peered at the speaker silently and resumed his work. Vargovitch left the room and shortly afterward the other visitors dispersed.

"I would do what Vargovitch says, Nicholas Litizki," remarked one of the tailor's assistants.

Litizki worked away as if he had not heard, and his thoughts were not pleasant or hopeful. It had seemed to him as if every compatriot of his in the city would need but the suggestion to unite in an effort to outwit Poubalov and rescue Strobel. Litizki could not understand it,

and he was disappointed. It was while he was meditating thus that Clara and Louise called.

The little tailor almost blushed as he left his bench and went to meet them.

"I should almost say," he began hurriedly, after he had awkwardly acknowledged their greetings, "that you ought not to come here. Are you aware that Poubalov may be, probably is, watching your every step? That man has the eyes of a thousand, and if it were possible to throw him off the track it would be best to do so. But it is impossible. If you did not come here, he would find out that you know me, and he would infer the rest."

"You seem troubled, Mr. Litizki," said Clara, kindly; "have you, too, given up Mr. Strobel?"

"I? Never! It is because I do not give him up that—well, yes, I am troubled. Why disguise the fact that Poubalov is a powerful enemy? I am not a coward, Miss Hilman; my life is not worth enough to me to make me care for it, but I fear that man's power will be too great for the friends of Ivan Strobel."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Yes, I—" Litizki averted his eyes and continued: "He has been here, to-day, not more than half an hour ago."

"I hope, Mr. Litizki," said Clara, "that you will not put yourself in his power. If you feel that it is dangerous to help in the search for Mr. Strobel, you must not do it."

"Dangerous? It is too late to think of that, if I cared about it. That man has possession of Mr. Strobel, and will keep him until he has accomplished some purpose. Strobel will not yield." Litizki paused and looked gloomily away. "You see, it is a question of how to circumvent Poubalov," he added.

"I am afraid, Mr. Litizki, that your loyalty to your friend will bring misfortune upon you. I should be very sorry for that."

"Ah, Miss Hilman," muttered the tailor, and a sad wistfulness lingered briefly in his eyes, "you are worthy

Clara was deeply touched, and her voice trembled as she said:

"Thank you, Mr. Litizki. I hope to be worthy of your kind thoughts. I may learn something to-night that will put another light on the case. Is it too much to ask you to call at my uncle's house some time during the evening?"

"Not if you lived in Siberia, Miss Hilman. Where is it, and when shall I come?"

Clara gave him the address and left him, begging him to come early. When they were on the way home, Louise said:

"I am more and more amazed at your method every day, dear. Have I not been good to listen, and ask no questions and volunteer no advice?"

"Too good, dear. I should often want advice, and ask it, but that I fear hurting you by not following it. I must go my own way."

"Of course you must, but I was just leading up to this question: What in the world do you want of Mr. Litizki this evening?"

"I hardly know myself, dear; but if that 'second driver' calls, I hope to make Mr. Litizki useful. Will that do?"

It had to, for Clara fell to thinking, and her cousin saw that questions would be irritating.

Mr. Pembroke sent word from his office that he should not come to dinner, and he had not arrived when the servant announced a caller, and handed a card to Clara. It was Poubalov.

"I suppose," said Clara, showing not the least surprise; "that I'd better see him alone. Will you wait here" (they were in the dining-room), "in case I should want you?"

Poubalov smiled and his face looked almost attractive as he rose and bowed when Clara entered the drawing-room. At that instant Clara felt that but for his self-confessed methods of deceit, she could have trusted him, and

this in spite of the black pictures that Litizki and Paul Palovna had drawn of him.

"I am delighted, Miss Hilman," he said, "to observe that you endure your sorrow and your remarkable work so well."

"I am told that nothing escapes you," replied Clara, "and so I suppose you know all about my search for the driver of Mr. Strobel's second carriage."

"Miss Clara," said a servant at the hall door, "a man who says his name is Billings wishes to see you."

"Show him into the library, please," answered Clara, then to Poubalov—"Will you pardon me? This is the man of whom I was speaking, and I must see him."

"Pray do," responded the Russian; "my message can well wait until he has gone."

Clara at once crossed the hall into the library. The minute she was out of the room Poubalov went to the door and cautiously opened it a little way. He closed it quickly and reflected. Clara had left the door from the hall to the library wide open, and the street door would be easily in view to anybody in the library.

Poubalov went from one to another of the several windows and looked out. From one at the side of the room he saw a few yards of turf bounded by a low hedge, and beyond that the park-like grounds surrounding a large dwelling. This window was partially open.

The spy looked once more toward the hall door. He had given his hat and stick to the servant, and they had been placed somewhere in the hall. He shrugged his shoulders, pushed the window further up and stepped out.

A moment later, Louise, who was idly gazing out of the dining-room window, was considerably startled to see a man, whom in the gathering dusk she could not recognize, leap over the hedge into the adjoining grounds, and disappear behind the shrubbery.

CHAPTER XII.

LITIZKI BREAKS HIS APPOINTMENT.

In the brief interval that elapsed between the time when she turned from Poubalov and the moment she entered the library, Clara reflected that while her loyal heart would rebel at the story to be told by Billings, she must hear him patiently, and not permit her distrust of him to manifest itself. One can think to good purpose in even so short a time as it takes to walk across a room. Clara was fully resolved to be guided by her reason alone in dealing with Billings, and not to permit herself to doubt his story if it should prove, as was probable, that what he had to say tended to corroborate the detective's theory.

Yet, when she looked at him, all her woman's intuition rebelled. She saw a man perhaps twenty-five years old, with nothing whatever remarkable in his appearance; but in his eyes and attitude there seemed to be a consciousness of antagonism, as if he expected to be doubted, sharply cross-examined, and as if he were determined that nothing should shake his story. His sullen, dogged expression was a help to Clara in conquering her immediate aversion to him, and she began the critical interview with a move that surprised and embarrassed him.

He was sitting, holding his hat on his knees, at the farther side of the room. Clara crossed directly to him with outstretched hand, saying:

"I am Miss Hilman. You are Mr. Billings, I believe. I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you. Mr. Bowker may have told you how I hunted the city over to find you. Sit down, please; let me take your hat."

Billings had risen awkwardly as he saw that she was

coming toward him, and, quite unaware of how she managed it, he found that she had taken one of his hands in her own. In his confusion he let his hat fall, picked it up hastily, and at last sat down again, feeling still the warm clasp of Clara's hand, while with bewildered eyes he saw this self-possessed, queenly young woman place his battered hat upon a table and draw up a chair opposite to him. He had not said a word. If he had come with any set phrases for beginning his story, they were completely driven from his mind.

Clara looked at him for a moment, and he averted his eyes.

"Were you acquainted with Mr. Strobel?" she asked presently, speaking in low tones that needed no art to color with the sadness that weighed upon her heart.

"No'm, I wasn't," replied Billings, with a quick glance at her.

"I am sorry for that," said Clara, "and yet it shows how kind you are to come here and tell me about this matter. I suppose you had to come a long way."

"I live in the North End," said Billings, uneasily. "Bowker told me to come."

"The North End is a long way off," she declared, "and I thank you just the same. I suppose you may have told Mr. Bowker so carefully about this that you are tired of the matter, but I should like very much to hear you myself. Do you mind telling me just what you told him?"

"That's what I come for," and Billings seemed to be considerably relieved. "I was driving down Park Street," he began, "when I saw that the coupé just in front of me had got into trouble. I went slow because people got around thick, and, besides, I wanted to see what was the matter. As I was looking, the man in the coupé clumb out and asked me was I engaged. I told him no, and he got in. He seemed to be in a hurry."

"One moment," interposed Clara, gently. The narration struck her as distinctly parrot-like, and if it were something that he had learned to recite, she preferred to break

the thread of his story before he had come to the important part, rather than give him the advantage of establishing a statement in smooth order. If he were telling the truth, no manner of interruption could prevent him from eventually making himself understood; if he were lying, she must involve him in contradictions. So, without premeditation, Clara said:

"You are going just a little too fast for me, and I hope you will forgive me. Every detail, you know, seems important to me. Where had you been that morning, Mr. Billings?"

"Been to a funeral, miss," he answered promptly.

"Yes, so I understood; but where?"

"Out to Mount Auburn."

"That is quite a long way from Park Street, isn't it? It must be four miles."

"Yes'm, 'bout that."

"It was about eleven o'clock, or a little after, when Mr. Strobel's coupé broke down, and you had been to Mount Auburn and had just got back. I see. Where did you leave your passengers, the persons you took to the funeral, I mean?"

With a glance of sullen resentment Billings answered:

"At their house."

"Yes, Mr. Billings," and Clara smiled as if she were not in the least annoyed, "but that isn't telling where. I didn't ask for the street and number. Why should I? It was in Cambridge, was it not?"

After the slightest perceptible hesitation, Billings answered:

"No; 'twas in the West End."

"Ah, then you had come over Beacon Hill on your way somewhere. Where were you going, Mr. Billings?"

As Billings hesitated more noticeably, she continued:

"Do you have some regular place where you wait for passengers, or do you drive about picking them up where you find them?"

"I was going to the Old Colony Depot," said Billings, huskily.

"I see. Is it customary, Mr. Billings, for cabmen to leave the curtains of their carriages closely drawn after they leave a funeral party?"

"No, 'tain't, not long, but you wouldn't have me stop in front of the house to pull 'em up, would you?"

"Certainly not. You did quite right, doubtless. When did you first see the coupé?"

"At the corner of Beacon. It turned into Park Street just ahead of me."

"Where did Mr. Strobel tell you to take him?"

"To Dr. Merrill's church, Parker Avenue, Roxbury."

Billings didn't know it, but his examiner came very near to breaking down at this point. There was nothing as yet to show that the driver was not telling the truth, although Clara had prepared a trap for him that she intended to spring a little later, and the mention of the church where she was to be married brought up such a flood of emotions that it seemed as if she would choke. Then, too, whether Billings were practicing deceit or not, it was certain that for this moment at least she was following her lover's journey correctly, and she had arrived at that critical point where the change in his intentions, or in his power to act, occurred. So, it was in a very faint voice that she told Billings to go on. He immediately resumed his parrot-like narration:

"He seemed to be in a hurry, for he spoke quick. I closed the door on him, and got into my seat as fast as I could and whipped up. I wanted to get along myself, you see, 'cause it was quite a long drive, and I had to get back to the depot."

This last sentence sounded like a fresh thought interjected on the spur of the moment, for Billings spoke it slower than the rest, and glanced inquiringly at Clara, as if to see how she took it. She noticed the difference, but simply nodded, and Billings went on.

"Nothing happened till we got to Elliot Street. Then

the gentleman opened the door and hollered 'Driver!' I pulled up a bit and turned round to see what he wanted. 'Driver!' says he, 'I've changed my mind. Take me to the Park Square Station.' 'All right, sir,' says I, and he closed the door again. So I druv 'im to the station, and he got out and give me a dollar and went inside, and that's all there is to it."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Billings," said Clara; "I suppose you went directly to the Old Colony Depot after that?"

"Yes'm. That's where I went."

He rose as if there could be nothing more for him to say, but Clara was not done with him.

"Just one more question," she said; "sit down again, please. Did you see Mr. Strobel speak or bow to anybody at the station?"

"No'm. There wasn't many people about, and he hurried inside like as if his train was just going."

"Was there anybody there whom you knew?"

"Yes'm; and you can ask him. A feller named O'Brien, who works there, was just at the door as we drew up, and he says 'Hello' to me. He'll tell you he saw me land my passenger there, for he came forward, thinking to get the gentleman's bag to carry."

"Mr. O'Brien may have noticed where Mr. Strobel went after going into the station," mused Clara.

"Yes'm, he might. You might ask him."

"Thank you; I presume I shall. Now, Mr. Billings, I want to show you in some way that I appreciate your kindness in coming here to tell me this. I have had to drive about a great deal for two days, and shall have to use a carriage to-morrow. I shall be glad to employ you."

Billings flushed and shifted about uneasily

"I can't, miss," he muttered.

"Why not, Mr. Billings?"

The driver stole a glance at her earnest face, and saw nothing there but sad surprise.

"Why not?" Clara gave the man no help by suggesting a possible excuse.

"My carriage is engaged—that is," he blurted, "I haven't got any carriage that would be fit for you."

"What is the matter with the one in which you took Mr. Strobel?"

"It got smashed up and is being repaired. You see," and he mumbled his words so that they were almost unintelligible, "the same day a party of toughs hired it; they were kind o' swell toughs, and they got on a racket, and the carriage was damaged. 'Tain't fit to use."

"Mr. Billings!" Clara spoke with a sudden energy that startled the driver, "was Mr. Strobel in the carriage when it was damaged?"

"No'm, no'm, he wan't," stammered Billings.

The explanation suggested an entirely new thought to Clara. Before her mental vision there came swiftly a picture of her lover struggling with somebody—might it not be Poubalov?—in the carriage itself. She seemed to see a violent conflict in which seats and fixtures gave way as men's bodies fell heavily. And Ivan was overpowered, his enemies triumphed, he was motionless, unconscious—perhaps fatally injured, and they had hidden him away somewhere lest their crime come to the light!

This was wholly unlike the vision she had seen on the evening of what should have been her wedding day; it had none of the aspects of an hallucination; for as the alarming details shaped themselves in her thoughts, she was conscious that Billings sat before her, looking frightened, and that he rose again to go. In this instance she was but following the suggestions brought out by her inquiry to what might be their logical, natural conclusion.

"I am sorry you cannot drive me to-morrow," she said, recovering and withdrawing her eyes, which had been fixed in a strained stare upon Billings for a very brief period. "Before you go, tell me the names and addresses of the persons you took to the funeral, please.

"I don't remember," replied Billings, uneasily. "I shall have to look up my book; 'tain't here."

"Will you do so?" asked Clara, pleasantly, convinced now that the man was lying; "and send the names to me, please. Will you do that to-night?"

"Yes'm," replied Billings reaching for his hat.

"And what is your address?"

Billings told her, and she laid her hand gently on his arm. An idea that had occurred to her vaguely when his name was announced as she stood before Poubalov, now recurred to her in the shape of a plan. She would have Billings confront the Russian, and watch their faces narrowly for some sign of recognition, or alarm.

"Will you come into the next room a moment?" she said, "I have something to show you."

There seemed to be a shade of suspicion in his eyes, but he made no objection, and Clara conducted him to the drawing-room. It was dark. With a premonition of disappointment, Clara found a match on the mantel and lit the gas. After a hasty glance around she opened the door to the dining-room.

"Lou!" she whispered eagerly, "have you seen Mr. Poubalov?"

"No," replied Louise, coming forward and entering the parlor; "has he gone? Then it must have been he!"

"Who? What have you seen? Wait, come into the hall. Will you sit down just a minute longer, Mr. Billings? I shall be but a moment."

Billings complied, and the young ladies passed quickly into the hall, where the first thing that Clara saw were Poubalov's hat and stick lying upon a table. She turned in the utmost wonderment upon her cousin.

"All I can say," said Louise, "is that I saw a man leap over the hedge into Mr. Jordan's grounds a short time after you went into the drawing-room to meet Poubalov. I couldn't tell who it was, couldn't even see that he had no hat on. I feared he might be a tramp,

but thought then that he had been frightened away, and that there was no danger."

"He was frightened away?" murmured Clara, feeling her blood run cold; "he dared not face his man Billings!"

"I supposed," continued Louise, in agitation, "that Poubalov was with you. I heard no voices, but thought perhaps that you had gone into the library with him, for a door closed once."

"Yes, when Billings came. Oh! if Litizki were only here!"

"Why! what could he do?"

"I would have him follow Billings. Oh, I could cry! it is the one opportunity for solving this mystery that we have found, and now we are going to lose it!"

Louise was greatly distressed.

"Isn't there some way that you can detain Billings," she suggested, "until Litizki arrives?"

"No. He's been trying to get away for several minutes. It is just possible that Litizki may be near. I'll go out with Billings, as if to call at a neighbor's, and if I see Litizki will put him on the track at once."

She went upstairs for her hat, lingering over the preparation in order to give Litizki all possible opportunity to keep his appointment, and when she came down again Billings was in the hall.

"I can't wait no longer," he said gruffly.

"Very well," replied Clara; "I thank you again for calling. I am going as far as the next house, and you can escort me."

Billings scowled with disagreeable surprise. At the gate he waited to see which way she would turn.

"I'm not going that way, miss," he said, and started off at a rapid pace in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT BECAME OF LITIZKI.

Clara retired before her uncle returned, and when at last he appeared, it was only to pack his bag and hurry away to catch the midnight train for New York.

"I may be gone a week," he told Louise, "and I may get back in two days. Telegraph me at the Travelers' Hotel, if I am wanted for anything."

Mr. Pembroke's departure was a great disappointment to Clara. She reproached herself that she had not made an opportunity to tell him about her conversation with Poubalov and Litizki; it was his right to know everything that could possibly bear upon the case, and could she have told him, she would have besought him to advise her.

She was now in a bewildering maze of doubts and uncertainties. Billings had lied to her; she was almost as sure of that as if she had already proved it; but at what part of his story the falsehood began she could only guess. There was no doubt that Ivan had taken Billings' carriage. Did he give the driver orders to go to the Park Square Station? Did Billings drive to the station? The latter question she could answer with some degree of satisfaction by inquiry of the man O'Brien, and that seemed the first thing to do; but what then?

Poubalov had called to say something, and had not only gone away without saying it, but had gone in such wise as to leave no reasonable doubt that he dared not face the driver of the closed carriage. Was it not an inevitable inference that Billings had been hired by the Russian? It was with evident difficulty that Billings had stumbled through the story as it was. Would not Poubalov, recognizing the driver's mental inferiority, have argued that if

they were suddenly brought face to face, Billings would have betrayed their complicity by at least a start?

And Litizki, what had become of him? It was not to be thought of that he had abandoned the case. Poubalov had called at his shop during the day, unquestionably with some ulterior design. Could anything be more reasonable than to suppose that in some way the spy had frustrated the attempt of Litizki to help her?

The more she pondered the various puzzling aspects of the case, the more everything seemed to center upon Poubalov, and she shuddered with apprehension as Litizki's characterization of him recurred to her. He was, indeed, a terrible enemy.

Having in mind only the known facts in the case, and disregarding utterly all inferences and conjectures, she tried to reason along various lines, in the hope that thus a theory might be set up which should command sufficient respect to justify a new departure in her search. She began with the fact that Ivan had made every preparation for marriage—and there a new thought presented itself. He had surrendered his room; he must, therefore, have packed his belongings; had they been disturbed? This might be a matter of infinite significance, and one that she would attend to without delay.

"Louise," she said (they were at the breakfast table and her cousin was lingering over her coffee while Clara was absorbed in thought), "will you go downtown with me again to-day?"

"Of course, dear," replied Louise; "I will be ready in ten minutes."

Louise was relieved at Clara's suggestions. She had been hopelessly wondering what Clara could find to do next, and she dreaded for her cousin's health should there prove to be no active work upon which she could concentrate her faculties. She left the room to prepare for the day's jaunt, and Clara resumed her thinking.

Every preparation for marriage, and a start actually made for the church. Then an accident that somebody had

prepared. Who? There must have been somebody who had a great object to attain in preventing the marriage, or in getting possession of Ivan. Suppose it were Poubalov, what then? With the insight he himself had given her into his character, would he not do everything possible to throw her off the right track? If he had abducted Ivan, would he hesitate to abduct Litizki if he found that the little tailor was in his way?

It was vain to speculate for a reason for Poubalov's main action; that must lie in his capacity as a paid spy of a government with which Ivan, apparently, had been at one time in conflict. His subsequent actions, so far as she knew them, were all explainable on the theory that he had had to do with Ivan's disappearance.

And so her thoughts revolved around Poubalov, finding at every turn a trace of obliquity that was wholly in consonance with his character and his confessed methods.

Clara felt that her reasoning was bringing her to no definite end, although her brain teemed with courses of action that might have been possible could she have commanded the services of a corps of shrewd, faithful detectives. It is generally so with persons who have a great task to accomplish; they find themselves with more plans than resources, more brains than hands. Clara had just come to the sensible conclusion that, compelled to work substantially alone, she would undertake exactly one thing at a time, and, having chosen a line of inquiry, would follow it uninterruptedly to the end, when a servant announced that a man had called to see her.

"I couldn't catch his name, Miss Clara," said the servant, "but I'm afraid he's a beggar, he looks so forlorn and seedy."

Clara knew who it was and she sprang from her chair with more eagerness and animation than she had manifested at any time since the disastrous wedding day. She fairly ran into the drawing-room, both her hands extended, her face radiant with smiles, and completely overwhelmed poor Litizki with the warmth of her greeting.

"I was so afraid something dreadful had happened to you!" she exclaimed, "but I knew that you had not deserted me."

"Deserted you?" said Litizki huskily; "no, but I was afraid you would think so. I didn't know what Poubalov might have told you, and unless you thoroughly understand that man, that fiend, Miss Hilman, he is likely to make you believe anything."

"Then you know that he had been here! You must have recognized his hat in the hall."

"I saw it there and his stick, too, but I knew before then that he had been here. I came to tell you."

Litizki paused, the look of grateful relief that had overspread his features at first giving way to his customary depressed expression, and he fell into his habit of speaking with averted eyes, or with but occasional furtive glances at the person addressed.

"Do tell me," said Clara; "I have been very anxious about you."

Litizki thought a moment, and then asked:

"May I see Poubalov's cane?"

"To be sure," replied Clara, and she brought it to him from the hall.

Litizki took it, looked it over, felt along the top, and suddenly drew forth the handle, from which a gleaming blade depended. Clara started back with a low exclamation of alarm. Litizki touched the edge of the blade with his thumb, as a man tests a razor.

"Alexander Poubalov," he murmured gloomily, "held this over my heart once, not so long ago."

He thrust it back into its sheath, where it came to rest with an angry click, and handed the cane to Clara.

"That is the kind of man he is, Miss Hilman," he said; "I thought you might like to know."

If he had wished to impress Clara with the horrible gravity of the situation, with its frightful possibilities, he succeeded beyond measure. She held the cane, feeling that it epitomized the spy's career, and a dreadful faint-

ness depressed her which she at length overcame with the utmost difficulty. Having returned the concealed weapon to the hall, she sank into a chair and asked Litizki to tell her what had happened to him during the previous evening.

"You asked me to call early," he began, "and I set out to do so. Without going into unnecessary detail, I will say that I came up the street that ends nearly in front of this house, a little after seven o'clock. The exact time doesn't matter, for you will know as nearly as you need to when I tell you that just as I was about to cross the road I saw Poubalov in front of me. He had come by another route. I wasn't surprised, for the man seems to read one's thoughts, and it was as if he had known that I was coming, and had determined to prevent me.

"I doubted whether it would be wise to call as long as he was in the neighborhood, but all doubts were set at rest when he himself went up the steps and rang. Of course it would have been the height of folly for me to enter the house then."

"You had the right to," interrupted Clara; "I had asked you to come, and I needed you very much."

Litizki looked so miserable that Clara hastened to add:

"I didn't mean to reprove or find fault, Mr. Litizki. I forgot for the moment everything except that eventually, after Poubalov had run away, I wished you were at hand!"

"I hope I made no mistake, Miss Hilman," said Litizki; "at all events I could see no other course at the time than to do what I did."

"I have no doubt you were right. Go on, please."

"I determined to wait until Poubalov went away. If I had been familiar with the house, I might have found my way to the back door and sent word to you by a servant, but I dared not venture, for I knew not from what window Poubalov might be looking. The same reason induced me to leave the street, which is clearly in view from some windows, and, moreover, I did not care to risk

questions from anybody as to why I was loitering about. So I slipped into the adjoining grounds, where there is a lot of shrubbery, and crawled under a tree whose branches hung low.

"From where I lay I could see whether anybody entered or left the house by the front door and I also saw all the windows on one side. I had been there less than a minute when somebody went up the steps and was admitted. I could not see who it was, for the evening was cloudy and it grew dark very quickly."

"It was a man named Billings," said Clara; "he drove the closed carriage which took Mr. Strobel from Park Street."

"Indeed! I wish I had known it. Well, events happened pretty quickly just then, for it seemed to me that less than another minute had passed when Poubalov appeared at one of the windows on the side of the house. He raised it, stepped out, and leaped over the hedge, not five yards from where I lay. He passed so close to me that I could have reached out from under the tree and tripped him up! I lay very still, wondering what his action could mean, for as you must know, he was bareheaded. If I had dreamed then of going to the house, I could not have done so, for he crouched down by the hedge near the street, and I could see that he had his eyes on the door and that he was waiting. I then determined to follow him wherever he should go, for of course he meditated villainy. I may have prevented him in that—— Oh! I don't know!"

Litizki fairly groaned these words, and Clara was about to utter an anxious inquiry, when he resumed:

"Don't let me disturb you, Miss Hilman; I will tell the whole wretched story. How long we lay there I don't know, but you must, for at last you, I think it was you, came out of the house and walked down to the gate to say good-night to somebody who left you there—Billings I suppose—and walked away in a direction opposite to us. You, was it you? Yes, you waited a moment, and returned to the house, whereupon Poubalov immediately

got up, leaped over the hedge, darted across the road as noiselessly as if he were a cat, and disappeared.

"I followed as well as I could, and, as luck would have it, I soon overtook him, for he was strolling along slowly, as unconcerned as if he owned a house near by and were out for a breath of fresh air. He rambled on until he came to Washington Street, when he stopped at the curb and looked idly about for several seconds. There were many people about, and his bareheaded condition attracted attention. All the shops were open, and suddenly he darted into one of them. It was not a hat store, but when he came out, which was almost immediately, he had a hat on. I suppose he bought it for an extravagant sum off the head of some stranger. It would be like him.

"He idled about the neighborhood for as much as an hour, Miss Hilman, and I did all that I could think of to keep him in view without exposing myself. The man is a fiend with a million eyes! But wait, I'll tell you. At last he moved along, and, of course, I followed faithfully, noting every turn, that I might be able to go again by the same way if possible, or at least to the same place, wherever that might be. For in spite of my care I don't know what was his destination, if he had any. It is for this reason that I say I may have prevented him from some fresh villainy.

"At last, in a street to which I could readily return, he paused. I was across the way from him, and I slipped into a doorway, where I was wholly in the dark. I could see him, though, and for a long, long time he paced slowly back and forth, never once speaking to anybody, or looking about, or getting out of my sight. It didn't matter to me. I would have stayed on till I starved in my tracks, but eventually he crossed the street directly toward me. He could not see me, of that I am certain, but of course he had seen me—and— I am a helpless, good-for-nothing fool, Miss Hilman!"

"Why say that?" asked Clara kindly.

"Because he came straight into the doorway, put his

hand lightly on my shoulder and said in that deep, scornful voice of his: 'It is enough, Nicholas Litizki. Let us now go home,' and he laughed disagreeably."

Litizki stared aside with an expression of utter self-contempt.

"I weakly said to myself that it was a ruse to get rid of me, and I followed again as he walked briskly away. He took a street car and went straight to his room in Bulfinch Place. It was past midnight, and so I came this morning, Miss Hilman."

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

"What a hard and disagreeable experience," exclaimed Clara, "and so strange too! You have no occasion to reproach yourself, Mr. Litizki, with any neglect. You did all that any man could do, I am sure, and it may not prove to be unfortunate that Poubalov saw that you were watching him."

"I wish I could think so," responded the tailor, "and it is wonderfully kind of you to be so patient with my failure. Isn't there something that I can do now? I can do no work until this matter is settled, and it is torture to remain idle."

"I know how true that is," sighed Clara; "yes, there is something I think you can do. If Poubalov had not called last evening, and so changed all our plans, I should have asked you to follow Billings when he left the house. I have little faith in him, Mr. Litizki, and it seems to me that on leaving here last night he must have gone directly to report to his accomplice, or employer. Are you sure that Poubalov spoke to nobody?"

"If he did, it was no more than a passing word. He seemed to know no one."

Clara had to stop and think, for Litizki's story tended to upset her theories concerning Poubalov's exit and his relations with Billings. Could it be possible, after all, that Billings had not been employed by the spy, and that the latter, therefore, had had nothing to do with Ivan's disappearance? Perhaps Poubalov worked through still another accomplice, and, suspecting possible treachery, had been at the pains of secretly following Billings, to learn whether he and the unknown other were faithful.

This seemed rather a wild supposition, for it would not be like Poubalov to admit others into his secret operations.

Had he followed Billings? There was no doubt in Clara's mind that this was what he started to do when he leaped over the hedge and ran to the side of the road opposite to where Billings was walking. Had Poubalov lost Billings in the darkness, and, observing Litizki's pursuit, purposely dodged hither and thither, to discomfit the tailor?

From every question Clara turned more puzzled than before. It must be that she was on the wrong track, else a reasonable answer could be found, a reasonable explanation suggested for every act. Perhaps she was wrong in obstinately connecting Poubalov with the first act in the tragedy, the disappearance of Ivan; but if so, could his conduct even then be explained?

"Mr. Litizki," said Clara, at length, "I want to know all that can possibly be learned about this man Billings. He gave me his address. Will you undertake to look him up? Unless he is very closely in league with Poubalov, he will not know who you are, and for that matter it probably won't be necessary for you to meet him. Eventually you might have to follow him somewhere, but at the start you might learn a great deal from his neighbors."

"I'll do it, Miss Hilman; but I promise you now that every step I take will be dogged by Poubalov."

"Well, never mind. You will be on you guard against him—and yet, I do not want you to expose yourself to danger," and Clara shuddered as she thought of the long dagger concealed in Poubalov's cane.

"Bah!" returned Litizki, "I care nothing for the danger. My only fear is that the villain will overreach me in anything I may attempt. I am no match for him in skill and cunning, Miss Hilman."

Litizki was woefully dejected. Never did man so long to be possessed of genius, or even talent, and the tailor was painfully aware of his own deficiencies.

"You underestimate yourself," said Clara; "you see that I have confidence in you, else I would not ask you to undertake the investigation. Will you begin at once?"

"Gladly. You cannot imagine how much courage your good words give me. If I dared to cherish a hope of any kind, it would be that I should accomplish something that would justify your good opinion."

"You have already done so, and will do more, have no doubt of it! I am going downtown myself. Suppose you go to the address Billings gave me, make such inquiries there as seem advisable, and, if you see nothing to command your immediate attention, come and tell me what you have found. I shall be at Mrs. White's. If you come after I go, you will find some word from me as to where to go next."

She gave him Billings' address, saw him to the door with a cheering smile, and then turned to Louise, who had been ready to start for several minutes.

"He had what was to him a dismal story to tell," said Clara, "and I knew he would rather tell it to me alone."

"I supposed so," returned Louise, "and so I took pains not to interrupt you. I wish I could think a quarter as well as you do, dear. I don't feel as if I were the least use."

"Don't be silly, Lou," and Clara embraced her cousin affectionately; "if I could think as well as you imagine I do, we should be out of the difficulty in a day. What do you suppose I should do without you?"

Louise was profoundly convinced that Clara would do exactly as she had been doing all along, but she didn't say so. She would have sympathized acutely with Litizki's self-abasement had she known how earnestly he had striven to be of use, and how utterly he had seemed to fail.

They went first to the Park Square Station, Clara, as usual, deeply absorbed in studying the strange problems that confronted her. The impression she had received this morning that Poubalov might not have been associated

directly with Ivan's taking off, grew upon her. How readily he had abandoned the suggestion of elopement! Abandon? he had ignored it utterly. Not once in her conversation with him had he put that forth as an explanation worthy of investigation. Could it have been his subtle purpose to interest her in a line of inquiry that should lead directly away from that? A shiver passed over her frame, and Louise inquired anxiously what was the matter?

"New theories keep occurring to me," responded Clara gravely, "and each one is a shock worse than the one that preceded it. Let me tell you this one. Suppose that Lizzie White," Clara spoke with difficulty, every word seemingly dragged forth by a violent effort, "suppose she were in some way Poubalov's agent; I will not, cannot think that Ivan went away with her, but might it not be possible that this remarkable man, who has such mastery over ordinary minds, had made her an accomplice? Don't you see the cleverness of the plan? If Ivan was forced to go to New York, Lizzie's departure for that city the same day is immediately assumed by everybody to mean that they eloped, and probably all in Boston who think of the matter at all, suppose that they have been married. Ivan may be a prisoner in New York, and Lizzie may be under Poubalov's pay, or influence, the latter more likely, to act, not as his jailer, but as a mask for his presence there.

"Poubalov has some object to attain in keeping him thus guarded, to torture some political secret from him, perhaps. Now what better could he do than divert suspicion in my mind from Lizzie to those whom he calls Nihilists, or even upon himself? He saw at first glance that I would not tolerate the thought of an elopement as among the possibilities, so he had need to disarm me of suspicion in that direction. Has not everything he has done been done with a view to keeping me in Boston? What does he care how much poor Litizki dogs his steps, so long as the victim of his intrigue and villainy is hundreds of miles away? His one fear in Boston is that Billings, whom he

hired to help in the abduction, may confess something. Therefore he tried to dog Billings' steps last night, and whether he succeeded I do not know."

Much of this was Greek to Louise, and she said so, adding: "What I do understand is that you feel now as if it would be necessary to go to New York."

"I think so. We will see."

"Clara," said Louise, "you will not think that I have suspected Ivan of faithlessness, I am sure; but it has seemed to me that unless he returned soon, you would have to go to Lizzie White. You cannot leave any possible explanation unsought. I could not conjecture that she and Poubalov might be concerned together as you have, but I did feel as if you ought to look her up."

"I am glad you think so," responded Clara, "for I was afraid you would oppose my going."

At the station Clara readily found the Mr. O'Brien to whom Billings had referred for corroboration of a part of his story.

"Yes'm," he said in reply to her questions, "I know the Billings you speak of. I saw him here last Monday. Has he been up to anything crooked?"

"I don't know," said Clara; "it may help to settle that if you will tell me what were the circumstances of his call here."

O'Brien hesitated.

"I don't want to get tangled up in any police business," he declared; "Billings was said to be the man who drove the gent that skipped on his wedding day early this week."

"Yes," said Clara; "I am Miss Hilman, and I was to be married to the gentleman."

"Sho!" exclaimed O'Brien, sympathetically, "that must have been a pretty tough blow," and he scratched his head thoughtfully.

"My inquiry," continued Clara, "has nothing to do with the police. They have abandoned the investigation, I be-

lieve. I am trying simply to satisfy myself, and surely you won't refuse to help."

"No, I won't," replied O'Brien; "but what I can say won't do you no good. This was how it was. I had to go out to the front of the depot for something, and just as I got there, Billings drove up a closed carriage. I thought he nodded as if he wanted me, so I stepped forward. He pulled up further on than where carriages generally stop, and was in a place all by himself. I was the only one near. 'Hello,' says I, 'how long you been driving?' 'Mind your own business,' says he, and he whipped up and drove off. While I was speaking to him a man had got out of the carriage and gone into the depot. I didn't see him to know him, didn't pay any attention to him, for he went quickly, and I was wondering about Billings."

"He says you came forward to get his passenger's baggage."

" 'Tain't so. That ain't my line of work."

"Didn't the passenger pay his fare?"

"Not there. He went straight into the depot."

"Why did you ask Billings that question?"

" 'Cause I didn't know he'd got into the cab business. He used to be a porter."

Clara thanked O'Brien, said she might call again if any other questions occurred to her, and the young ladies went on to Ashburton Place. Billings had lied, but it might have been Ivan, nevertheless, who went into the station from the closed carriage.

Mrs. White's greeting was marked by constraint, and she sat in distressed silence for a moment after Clara and Louise entered. At length she said:

"People will talk so! I'm sure you've been very good and brave, Miss Hilman, but what is one to think?"

"I don't know what you mean, Mrs. White."

"Well, don't you see, lots of my friends have called, seeing Lizzie's name in the papers, and Mr. Strobel's, and they will have it that they eloped."

"Do you think so?" asked Clara, and in spite of her effort her tone was cold.

"I don't know what to think," replied the landlady, plaintively.

"You may think what you please," said Clara, her pride mastering her diplomacy for the moment; "I am going to New York to see your daughter. I called to say that you might write to her freely so far as any wish of mine is concerned, and to ask if I could take a look at Mr. Strobel's room."

"Certainly," answered Mrs. White, uncomfortably. She longed to ask the imperious young lady a host of questions, but she was restrained by Clara's hauteur.

The young ladies went up to Ivan's room, and found there his trunk as he had left it, apparently, and everything in just such condition as would be expected if a man were about to move and were going to send for his effects later.

When they went down again they found Litizki talking with Mrs. White.

"So you are going to New York to-day?" he said with some appearance of disappointment.

"Yes," replied Clara, "but I don't care to have that information go further. Will you be careful, Mrs. White?" Forgive me if I seemed harsh just now. I shall say nothing unkind to your daughter, and I believe less than ever that she eloped with Mr. Strobel. What have you found?" she asked, turning to Litizki.

"Billings doesn't live at that address," he replied, "although he used to. He hasn't been about there for some time, and no one in the neighborhood knew he was a cab-driver."

"Very well," said Clara. "There is nothing more to do in that direction for the present. I shall return from New York on Saturday morning, probably. I should like to see you then, if possible."

"Yes, Miss Hilman. What train are you to take? I might have something to report to you at the last minute."

Clara reflected and answered:

"I shall have to go home first. I don't see how I can go earlier than by the three o'clock New England train. Will you be there?"

Litizki said he would, and after some further conversation with Mrs. White the young ladies returned to Roxbury. Louise did not prepare to go to New York, the extra expense this journey involved deterring her, for Mr. Pembroke was not one who reveled in great wealth. It was decided to apprise him of Clara's coming by telegraph, so that she would not be without escort in the city.

Litizki was at the train as he promised to be, and assisted Clara to her seat in the drawing-room car. He lingered until the starting signal had been given and then said "good-by" and jumped off; but instead of remaining in the depot, he ran forward and boarded the ordinary smoking-car.

CHAPTER XV.

LOUISE RECEIVES A CALLER.

Mr. Pembroke met Clara at the train when it arrived in the Grand Central Depot promptly at nine o'clock. He was plainly anxious, almost agitated.

"Tell me, child," he exclaimed, "why you have come?"

"I couldn't be satisfied," she replied, "without setting at rest the rumors that connect Ivan's name with Lizzie White."

"Oh," said her uncle, apparently relieved, "is that all?"

"All, uncle? Why, no, not if I find anything that leads me to believe that Ivan is in New York. In that case I shall search for him here. What did you think I had come for?"

"I had nothing in mind except anxiety. When I received your telegram, I feared something had happened. I couldn't tell what. I have been so occupied with business matters recently that I haven't been able to keep up with you, you know."

"I'm so sorry to give you more trouble and anxiety," said Clara, with the sincerest contrition, "but I felt as if I must come on."

"Let us go straight to the hotel," said Mr. Pembroke; "I suppose there's nothing you want to do to-night?"

They had been standing on a station platform as they talked, and not far away was Litizki, watching, trying to listen, and wondering who the gentleman could be whom Clara greeted so affectionately. He knew nothing about her relationships, and supposed that Mr. Pembroke was her father. He followed them and saw them enter a hack, and he managed to get near enough to overhear Mr. Pembroke say "Travelers' Hotel" to the driver. Not content

with knowing the hotel, however, Litizki ran along the sidewalk, keeping the vehicle in view all the way, and he did not turn aside content until he saw by the departure of the hack empty that Clara and her escort were both in the hotel. Then he felt that she would be safe through the night, for he was possessed of the idea that the powerful Poubalov would follow her, and he feared that she would come to harm at his hands.

Mr. Pembroke had said little on the way from the depot to the hotel, but when they were in the quiet of Clara's room, he remarked:

"I suppose, my dear, that this coming to see Lizzie White is the last step you will take in this matter, isn't it?"

"I cannot tell yet, uncle," she replied; "I do not see why it should be, but, of course, I know so many things connected with the case that I have had no opportunity to tell you—things that I want to tell. I have needed somebody's advice, so much, and I could not intrude on you when you are so busy. I would not even now but that I think you ought to know as much as I do of what has happened."

An expression of pain crossed Mr. Pembroke's features, and he responded uneasily:

"Of course I want to help you, Clara, and I am more regretful than I can possibly express that my business has been in such shape."

"Are you seriously alarmed about it, uncle?"

"I was, but I think we shall pull through all right now. Let us talk of your affairs. I would like to suggest, with all sympathy, Clara, that the world in general, while it would admire your loyalty if it understood it, would yet do so in a pitying way that would be eminently distasteful to you if on your own part you understood the world. You see, you are regarded, no matter how unjustly, as deserted. You have a remarkably clear head, and you must see what I mean without putting me to the necessity of using disagreeable terms."

Clara flushed. She felt at that moment the full force of the calamity that had overtaken her. While she was actively at work building up theories, investigating clues, and examining those who might throw light on the matter, her grief had been measurably lightened. The thought that she was working, however doubtfully, toward an end, had enabled her to keep her emotions in control. Her uncle's words, which were evidently but the preface to an appeal to give up the struggle, reopened her wounds. It was as if he had torn away the foundations of that structure of the mind by which she had supported her heart. With difficulty she restrained her tears, and responded:

. "It would be better, uncle, to use plain language. Then there would be no possible chance of a misunderstanding. I know how I am looked upon, as deserted by my lover, perhaps not for another woman, but at all events deserted by him. The world will say that it would comport better with womanly dignity to suffer in silence and solitude, and that it is unmaidenly to pursue the man."

"You use harsher language than I would have used had I spoken without consideration of your feelings," interposed her uncle, nervously. His niece's faculty for manifesting occasionally an imperious will, and of firmly maintaining her own way without regard to general opinion, had always been a bit of a terror to him. It was difficult for him to reconcile it with her affectionate disposition, her real consideration for the sufferings of others. He could not see that in this matter, without the faintest trace of egotism, she unconsciously measured her own suffering as infinitely greater than that of anybody else who was related to the case, and that she as unconsciously asserted her right to minister to that suffering in the way best calculated to alleviate it. Such characters as hers, under the pressure of great trouble, elevate self-interest to the very heights of nobility.

"I ask no consideration for my feelings," said Clara, almost coldly; "it seems to me that real consideration would credit me not only with dignified motives but with an in-

telligent basis for my conduct. Uncle dear," and she suddenly crossed to him and put her arms about his neck, "let me take that back. I didn't mean it. I wouldn't for the world say an unkind word to you, but you see I feel my lonely position so keenly. I do what I think is right, but there is no one to uphold me."

Mr. Pembroke disengaged her arms, and again the expression of pain flitted across his face.

"I am doing as well as I can under the circumstances," he said huskily, "not only to show you my deep sympathy, but to guide you also. For your own interests, I must point out one possibility of your interview to-morrow. I shall place no obstacle in the way of your seeing Lizzie White, but I caution you, without knowing more about her than that she left a good home, that she may take a most unfriendly attitude. If there is anything unseemly in the meeting, I know that it will arise from her. No one can tell me that she lacks your native refinement; it must be so; a woman such as she is at heart may make a dreadful scene, whether she be interested in Ivan or not. To be concerned in such a scene, my dear child, would be a stigma from which even your goodness could not escape. Clara, there is nothing so scandalous as a quarrel between women when a man is in question."

"You wish me not to see her," said Clara, faintly.

Mr. Pembroke rose and paced up and down in extreme agitation for several minutes, while Clara sat with a dreadful weight upon her heart; for she not only loved her uncle, and wished earnestly to be guided by him if possible, but she also realized that his warning was a wise one. She had herself, with all her thought, scarcely considered how she should approach Lizzie White. So certain was she that Ivan had not eloped with her, that the interview itself had not appealed to her as more than a friendly discussion of facts and rumors as to which both would be in accord. But there was her theory that Lizzie might be an accomplice of Poubalov's. What attitude might she not

take, therefore, in order to carry out her part in the spy's design?

"I would say yes," declared Mr. Pembroke at length, "for that is my wish, but I do not, cannot say it. Go to this Lizzie White to-morrow, Clara. You will know how to speak with her better than I can tell you. I will myself go to the house with you, but you shall have your meeting all alone if you so desire. Of course you do."

"Then, uncle," said Clara, "let me tell you of the strange things that have occurred since I began to search for Ivan. I am sure you will feel, when you know all, that I am justified in my general course, however much I may have been mistaken in details."

Mr. Pembroke listened with the closest attention to the narrative. He was deeply moved by it, and when she had finished he said brokenly:

"There is great villainy at work here."

Then he leaned his head upon his hand, shielding his eyes from hers as she eagerly sought, not so much commendation of her persistence as suggestion as to what to do, or some theory upon which to explain the many mysteries that centered upon the disappearance of Ivan.

"I wonder," he mused at last, "if this could have been accident?"

"Accident, uncle!" exclaimed Clara, with just a touch of impatience; "don't you see that if it had been accident, we should have known of it? Think: in a busy street of a city no accident could have occurred by which Ivan could be incapacitated without some report of it coming to the authorities. Even if Ivan had not been taken to a hospital in the usual way, but had fallen into the hands of private persons, it is not possible that with all the stir that was made by his disappearance, police or reporters should not have found some trace of him."

"True, true," said Mr. Pembroke, vacantly; "I was thinking—you see it is hard to master all these strange details at once. I marvel at your courage."

"Courage! What else could I do?" asked Clara.

"Nothing with your character, nothing else. You have done right, Clara. I am very tired. Let us talk further of this in the morning."

Mr. Pembroke was not disposed to talk in the morning, however, and Clara was engrossed with a long letter from Louise that had been mailed on the train leaving Boston at midnight.

"Poubalov," she wrote, "was at the house when I returned from seeing you off. If the man were capable of expressing emotion, I should say that he was disappointed at not seeing you; but whatever he felt, he masked it under his grand assumption of dignity and courtesy. He had called, he said, to make his apologies for his extraordinary leave-taking of the evening before, and also, he added with ponderous humor, to recover his property. I got his hat and cane for him, and what do you think! he had brought a lovely basket of flowers for you, to plead his apologies, as he put it. There was no refusing such an offering, dear, and I am enjoying their fragrance and rich colors as I write. I hope this will reach you in time to be of use if Poubalov's call can be of use to you in New York. I thought it my duty to report it. I felt how immeasurably superior you are to me intellectually—I won't draw other comparisons lest they be odious to one of us—for I was utterly at a loss to draw him out. He didn't present his excuses to me, and how he managed to evade doing so I can't quite see now as I think it over, for he remained several minutes, talking with apparent candor. The man himself is as great a mystery as anything connected with your trouble. All I can say is that with one hat on his head, and his other hat and his cane in his hand, he eventually took his departure, promising to call again. There is one thing I managed not to do, though it was quite plain, even to me, that he was trying to find out. I didn't tell him where you were. Of course I had to say that you were not at home, and in answer to direct questions that I did not expect you before Saturday, but I didn't even hint at New York or Lizzie White, and he made no allusion to either.

Did I do right? I hope so, for I have felt so often what a shame it is that I cannot be of more help to you. I believe in Ivan as you do, dear, and my heart and thoughts with are you."

They were at breakfast in the great dining-room of the hotel when Clara read this letter, and she furtively kissed the paper that conveyed such loyal sympathy to her. As she replaced the letter in the envelope, she was surprised to see the old man Dexter hobbling across the room. There was an ugly scowl upon his face as he bowed to her, and Mr. Pembroke rose from his chair with an expression little less than fierce.

"Another time, Dexter," he exclaimed under his breath, taking the old man by the arm and wheeling him around. As Mr. Pembroke walked him away, Clara heard Dexter croak:

"What is she here for, Mat Pembroke?"

When her uncle returned, his face was still dark and he said:

"Business necessities, Clara, that sometimes compel a man to tolerate disagreeable persons. I wouldn't have him near you, however."

"He is disagreeable, surely," responded Clara, "but I could have borne with him for your sake, uncle."

The subject seemed intensely disagreeable to Mr. Pembroke, and nothing further was said about it.

After breakfast Mr. Pembroke inquired the number of the house on Second Avenue from which Lizzie White had written, and they set out to find it.

"I shall have to leave you, Clara," said her uncle, "as soon as I am sure you have found the right place. I will call for you or I will put a carriage at your disposal."

"There is no telling how long I shall be," returned Clara, "and I don't see why you should need to inconvenience yourself. I have acquired more self-dependence during the last three or four days than I ever had before, and I think you can trust me to take care of myself. But I should think it would be well to have a carriage at com-

mand; and, uncle, all the expense I have been to thus far has come from my allowance. You will let me pay for a carriage, won't you?"

"If you prefer to," said Mr. Pembroke, "and we will engage one in the vicinity of the house as we can reach the place readily by a cross-town line of cars."

So they proceeded by street-car, and when they alighted in Second Avenue they were but a short distance from the desired number. Mr. Pembroke signaled to a passing hack and instructed the driver to wait near the house to which they were going. Then they continued their way on foot.

Just before they came to the steps leading up to the door their attention was attracted by the noise of a man running behind them, and then a voice panting, "Miss Hilman! Miss Hilman!"

They turned about quickly, and, to her unspeakable surprise, Clara saw that it was Litizki. His sallow face was flushed with the exertion of his long run, for he had chased them afoot from the hotel. He could hardly speak for lack of breath when he came up to them, but he did manage to gasp:

"I've seen him, Miss Hilman, this morning!"

CHAPTER XVI.

LIZZIE WHITE.

Clara clutched her uncle's arm convulsively and leaned heavily upon him.

"You have seen Mr. Strobel?" she whispered.

All the color fled from Litizki's face as he realized how woefully he had put his foot in it. In the intensity of his hate for Poubalov and his distrust of him, he had forgotten for the moment that the spy was but a secondary figure in the drama they were enacting. Clara saw in the little tailor's distressed expression that she had interpreted his words erroneously. The double shock well nigh unnerved her.

"Let us walk on a little way," she said faintly. Stuyvesant Square was near by, and Mr. Pembroke led her within the gates and sat with her upon a bench. Litizki followed humbly, suffering miserably from his indiscreet zeal, and Clara told her uncle who he was. Mr. Pembroke asked:

"Well, my man, who is it you have seen?"

"Alexander Poubalov, sir," he replied with his eyes upon the ground.

"Strange!" said Mr. Pembroke, turning to his niece; "did you tell him you were coming to New York?"

"No; I didn't mean that he should know it. He called at the house yesterday after I had gone, and Louise writes that she withheld any definite information about my whereabouts."

Mr. Pembroke looked inquiringly at Litizki.

"I came on yesterday by the same train that brought Miss Hilman," he said, "for I didn't know that there was anybody in New York to watch out for her. There was

nothing for me to do in Boston, and I was afraid for her. Neither of you know this man Poubalov as I do. I should say that he had the gift of second sight, but I don't believe in the supernatural. He is not only a master of deceit, but he has marvelous powers of discernment. I was certain that he would pursue Miss Hilman, and I wanted to do what I could to protect her.

"Mr. Litizki has been very kind and faithful, uncle," said Clara; "you remember that I told you about him."

"Yes," replied Mr. Pembroke, to whom the idea of his beautiful niece under the watchful eye of such an unprepossessing man was distasteful. "How did you come to see Poubalov?"

"I went to the hotel very early this morning," was the reply, "and hung around where I could keep all the doors in view. Poubalov turned up about half-past seven. He was walking very rapidly. He went first into the hotel near yours, and I saw him examining the register at the clerk's desk. Presently, with the same hurried strides, he came out and went into the Travelers'. There he looked over several pages of the register, and when he had finished he strolled to the door leisurely. All his hurry was gone, and after pausing to light a cigarette, he went slowly down the avenue. I remained to give warning to Miss Hilman. I didn't know your name, sir, or I would have sent for you, and I couldn't get a chance to say a word until just now. I am very sorry that I gave Miss Hilman a wrong impression."

"Don't think of it, Mr. Litizki," said Clara, who was rapidly recovering her accustomed calmness; "it is all over now. You see, uncle, how strangely I am beset. There is no doubt, from Poubalov's actions, that he has followed me here. What is his purpose? To put Lizzie White on her guard? Then he has circumvented me, for he has had nearly two hours in which to act since he found from the register that you were staying at the Travelers', and perhaps my name, too, was on the book."

"Yes, I put it there myself, last night."

Clara rose and extended her hand to Litizki.

"You are a faithful friend," she said, "and I am very glad you told me this. I shall be the more satisfied with my talk with Miss White now, for I shall be able to ask questions that otherwise might not have occurred to me."

Litizki mumbled some words of acknowledgment of her kindness, and Mr. Pembroke asked anxiously whether she felt strong enough to proceed with her programme.

"Oh, yes," she answered bravely; "you won't need to wait longer. I will take the carriage afterward and Mr. Litizki, I suppose, won't be far away if I need escort."

"I shall not be far from you at any time," said the tailor.

"I shall be glad when you are through with it," sighed Mr. Pembroke. "I will accompany you as far as the house as I at first intended."

Litizki hung back as they started and remained within the entrance to the park until he saw them mount the steps, and until Mr. Pembroke had gone down again, leaving Clara in the house.

The servant who answered the ring had readily admitted that Miss White lived there, and had invited the callers to enter. She ushered Clara into a small reception-room, and, without asking her name, went to find Lizzie. Clara sat down to wait, feeling more perturbation than she had experienced at any time since her trouble began. She had not long to pass in painful speculations, for Lizzie White promptly responded to the summons.

"I supposed it was you," she said with a hard, resentful tone as she entered the room.

Lizzie would have been a comely girl if her rather sharp features had been softened by a pleasant expression. On the contrary, disappointment and bitterness dwelt in her eyes and drew down the corners of her mouth. She was dressed as a domestic servant, wearing a white cap and apron. She held an open letter in her hand, and sat down in the nearest chair without making the slightest advance to the kindly greeting that was upon Clara's lips as she

rose. It was as if she expected a disagreeable scene, and was determined not only to see it through, but to contribute her full share to its unpleasantness.

Clara's greeting was unuttered.

"Why did you think it was I?" she asked.

"This," said Lizzie, indicating the letter; "it's from mother."

"Did she tell you I was coming?"

"No, but she tells me how you've hunted for Mr. Strobel, and how people say he went away with me. I knew well enough you'd come on here to find him."

"It is hardly correct," said Clara, gently, "to say that I came on to find him, though I would go anywhere to do so."

"Yes, I guess you would."

Lizzie was relentless. Her tone spoke determination to make Miss Hilman suffer to the utmost. Clara conquered the emotions that Lizzie stirred within her, and added:

"From the start, Lizzie, I have steadfastly denied that Mr. Strobel went away with you, or that your departure had to do with his disappearance. Please understand me: I did not expect to find Mr. Strobel with you. If I had thought differently, I should not have come."

Lizzie laughed scornfully.

"No," she said, "you would have known that you were too late. You are very brilliant, Miss Hilman, but I guess you're finding that it takes more than that to hold a man."

This was as bad as anything that Clara had anticipated as among the possibilities of the conversation; but, holding her great purpose firmly in mind, she persisted in continuing the interview. Suffer insult she must, but she would not give up without obtaining some manner of information.

"For your own good name, Lizzie— —" began Clara, but the girl interrupted hotly:

"My good name! what have you to do with it, I should like to know? I hadn't seen any Boston papers, and I

didn't know until I got this letter that the whole city had talked about me. They have said that I eloped with Mr. Strobel, and that settles it, I suppose. Why didn't you let mother write to me the day she received my letter?"

"I didn't ask her not to write," replied Clara, feeling a little guilty at the thrust; perhaps she had gone too far in influencing the communication between mother and daughter, setting her own anxieties and griefs above theirs. "I asked her not to mention Mr. Strobel's disappearance, and she chose herself not to write at all. I did so because I confidently expected to obtain proofs in the evening that he could not have gone with you."

"Then you did think so!" cried Lizzie triumphantly; "you did fear, at least, that all your education and money and high society ways were not enough to keep him from falling in love with a poor girl who has no position!"

"I had no such thought," returned Clara, greatly distressed; "I did think that you would be happier to know that such a thought could not occur to me, as you would know if the circumstances were such as to prove that Mr. Strobel could not have come to New York."

"Me, happy!" exclaimed Lizzie, bitterly, and then in the same breath—"You found it quite possible that he could have come, didn't you?"

Ignoring the last part of her remark, Clara quickly took her cue from the first, and said very gently:

"Your mother showed me your letter in which you said you could be almost happy."

The color rushed to Lizzie's cheeks as she replied:

"Mother ought to have known better."

Then she shut her lips hard together, and it was plain that she was obstinately determined to say no more on that subject.

"I have sincerely tried," said Clara, "to think and act in a friendly way, Lizzie."

"Friendly with a rival!" and again Lizzie laughed with bitter scorn.

"I should not need the evidence of your words," re-

sponded Clara, "to convince me that there never was any rivalry between us."

She rose to go, and Lizzie looked at her with startled eyes. Was this to be the end of the conversation? Clara was the picture of haughty pride, unmoved apparently by any of the thrusts that Lizzie had tried to make so cruel. Jealously insensible to Clara's kindly advances, Lizzie was completely overcome by her manifestation of calm superiority. She bit her lip and crumpled her mother's letter in her hand.

"Mr. Strobel is not here," she said, and her voice broke as if the words choked her.

"I know it," remarked Clara, coolly, with her hand upon the door.

"Miss Hilman! don't go yet!"

There was the sign of coming tears in Lizzie's eyes, and Clara looked down upon her pityingly.

Lizzie made one last effort to recall her determination to be bitter, and compel her visitor to suffer as she suffered, but hers was not the strength of character to meet emergencies, overcome difficulties, and play a part unswayed by her deeper, genuine devotions. She extended her arms upon the table before her, and, laying her head upon them, burst into passionate crying. Clara laid her hand caressingly on Lizzie's head and waited until the first storm of sobs had begun to subside. Then she said in a quiet but not unkind voice:

"Lizzie, have you seen Alexander Poubalov this morning?"

The girl half raised her head, choked back the sobs and replied, "Who?" Clara repeated the name distinctly.

"I don't know who he is," answered Lizzie, wearily.

"Do you remember," asked Clara, "the gentleman who called on Mr. Strobel the morning he was to be married?"

"I remember somebody called," said Lizzie, absently; "mother showed him up. I didn't see him. What has he got to do with it?"

Clara felt that she must believe the girl, but she made

one further move to discover whether in any way she might be allied with Poubalov.

"Has anybody been to see you this morning?" she asked.

"No," replied Lizzie; "what has this man you mention ~~X~~ got to do with it?"

"Everything, I think," said Clara. "It looks as if he had caused Mr. Strobel's disappearance, abducted him in fact, and I know that he followed me to New York."

Lizzie was not keen enough to see that Clara had inferred a possible collusion between herself and Poubalov.

"Then," she said, "Mr. Strobel did not desert you at all!" and the tears welled from her eyes afresh. Clara knew that she would speak further, and after a moment, with her face in her hand, Lizzie moaned: "I am very unhappy, Miss Hilman." ~~X~~

"You must be, Lizzie," returned Clara, caressing her, ~~X~~ "and I don't ask you to tell me anything. I am sorry I had to break in on you; but if you understood how I have been more than puzzled by the strange conduct of Mr. Strobel's enemy, you would forgive me."

"Forgive? Why, Miss Hilman, it is my place to ask for forgiveness. I was so brutal when you first came in. Don't you see, I," her voice faltered pitifully but she continued desperately, "I loved Mr. Strobel before he ever met you, I think. He never mentioned love to me, but he was so good and kind that I foolishly thought he was fond of me. I suffered horribly when he told us of his engagement, and I couldn't get over it. I thought of running away many times, but I couldn't bring myself to do so while he was still with us. I thought perhaps I would feel differently after he was gone, but on that morning when he was getting ready for the church, I simply couldn't endure the thought of staying in the house any longer. So I came away. I hadn't made any preparation. I took the first train I could get, and while I was waiting I wrote a note to mother. Did you see it? No? I started to tell her why I went, but I couldn't, and I scratched the words out.

I knew one friend in New York, and she got me employment here, where I thought I could work hard and forget. I hadn't heard a word of Mr. Strobel's disappearance until I got mother's letter. Then—then I felt somehow as if it was my revenge, and I think I hated you as much for your suffering as I did because you won his love."

Clara heard this painful confession with an aching heart. Her sympathies were deeply touched by the artlessness with which this unhappy girl had developed bitterness and discontent from her love that it might take a lifetime of toil to soften.

"We both suffer, Lizzie," she said gravely; "I am glad now that I came. Shall I tell your mother anything?"

"No! no! I will write what's necessary. You can say that I am in a good family, and that some day I shall visit her."

Lizzie looked appealingly at Clara as if she would have her remain longer, but no good end was to be accomplished by prologing the interview, and Clara withdrew.

As she stepped into the waiting carriage, she beckoned to Litizki who stood near the next corner.

"I am going to the hotel," she said, "and as soon as I can I shall take the train for Boston. Will you get in?"

"No, thank you, Miss Hilman," replied Litizki, abashed. "I will return by street-car. If you could let me know what train you intend to take, I should like it."

"There's a train at noon. If I can see my uncle I will take that."

She was driven away, and Litizki, head down, gloomy, more and more impressed with the conviction that Poubalov was not only responsible for Strobel's disappearance, but that he also plotted evil to Clara, slowly left the vicinity. When he was well out of the way, Alexander Poubalov left the window of a room he had hired two hours earlier, directly across the street from the house where Lizzie White lived, and came out upon the sidewalk. After a quick glance up and down the avenue, he went over the way, rang the bell, and asked to see Miss White.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW LITIZKI SAVED MISS HILMAN.

The ladies' entrance to the Travelers' Hotel was upon the same street as the main corridor, almost next door to it. Clara glanced in as the carriage slowly passed the open doors and she saw her uncle at the further end, pacing slowly toward her. Two men were with him whom she did not at the moment recognize, but so anxious was she to have a word with him that when she alighted, instead of going in at the ladies' entrance, she stepped over to the main doorway and stood there to attract his attention as soon as he should come near.

He saw her immediately and quickened his pace. In that instant she saw that one of the other men was Dexter, and that he wheeled abruptly about, turning the third man around with him. Dexter hobbled back toward the clerk's desk and led his companion out of sight into a passage that terminated in the corridor. Clara saw this maneuver but dimly, as her attention was fixed upon her uncle, whose face had the haggard, anxious expression that she had noticed on it several times of late. He was quickly beside her, and attributing his anxiety largely to herself, she smiled bravely and said:

"There was no scandal, uncle, and very little of what you could call a scene."

"You are back sooner than I thought for," he responded with something of an effort. "Did you see anything?"

"Of Poubalov? No."

"I mean Strobel."

"Oh, no! I am convinced that Lizzie knows nothing of him, poor girl!"

"So am I," said Mr. Pembroke with a deep sigh; "I

have had no time, of course, to give the matter much thought, but my impression is, and it grows constantly stronger, that you will eventually find Strobel in Boston."

"And do you think I shall find him, uncle?" asked Clara, eager for encouraging words.

"I hope so, my child, I hope so. It does not seem possible that this affair will resolve itself into an unfathomable mystery. There are few such things in real life, you know, and if the worst had happened to Strobel, we would have heard of it."

"It gives me new courage to hear you say so," said Clara looking wistfully at her uncle, "I wanted to speak to you simply to let you know that nothing troublesome has happened, and that it is my intention to return to Boston as soon as possible, though I don't know what I can do after I get there."

"I would rest if I were you, Clara."

"I cannot think of rest now. We will see. Something may happen to give me a fresh start, or I may discover a new clew in something I already know, the significance of which I have overlooked."

"Don't try to do too much; rest if you can," pleaded Mr. Pembroke. "I shall return myself to-night."

"Do you want me to wait and go with you?"

"I wouldn't," exclaimed her uncle, hastily; "you'll find the journey nothing by daylight, and it might be fatiguing at night. You are familiar with it, and don't mind traveling alone for so short a time, do you?"

"Not at all. I merely thought you might want me to wait."

"No, Dexter will have to be with me. I will be with you at home in time for breakfast. You'll take the noon train; I suppose? Good-by."

Haste was evident in Mr. Pembroke's manner as well as in his words, and Clara bade him good-by at once. She went to her room for her traveling bag, and when she returned to the carriage Litizki was waiting for her.

"Is it the noon train, Miss Hilman?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered; "won't you ride to the station with me?"

"Do you wish it?" said the little tailor, hesitatingly.

"Of course I do. Come, there may be things we wish to tell each other."

So Litizki sat beside her on the way to the station, and after the carriage started he said:

"Miss Hilman, I shrink from asking questions, and yet I think you will admit that I have more than curiosity about the result of your call on Miss White."

"You have every right to know," she responded; "we talked very frankly after a while, and I came away satisfied that she is not an accomplice of Poubalov's."

Litizki stared out of the window in silence for a time, and finally spoke much as if he were addressing himself:

"When Miss Hilman says she is satisfied, it goes a great way to convince me."

"You are still in doubt, then?" asked Clara.

"I cannot help being so. Poubalov grows upon me until he is ever present in my mind, like a horrid nightmare. At every step we take it is Poubalov. If ever anything is discovered, you discover Poubalov's hand in it. Whenever we make an attempt to gain a point, we are frustrated, and it is Poubalov who stands over and above, in and through all, moving us with his master-hand, and setting up obstacles when we would move of our own will. We are at the mercy of him who knows no mercy, and so long as Poubalov remains—in America, we are without hope, unless he accomplishes his purpose and has no further use for Mr. Strobel."

Litizki spoke with profound melancholy and just that touch of extravagance in language that Clara had noticed the first time she saw him in Mrs. White's.

"I don't wonder," she said, "that you estimate Poubalov's power for evil so greatly, and it would be folly for the friends of Mr. Strobel to underestimate him; and yet, with a woman's imperfect reasoning, I feel that we shall some day outreach him."

"There is nothing imperfect in your reasoning, Miss Hilman," and for once Litizki addressed her directly, his gloomy eyes fixed upon her own; "but you are speaking from the kindness of your heart rather than from the logic of your brain. This is not my first experience with Poubalov. But no matter." He turned away abruptly and again gazed out of the window. "It is nothing short of greatness in you," he continued presently, "in the midst of your sorrow to try to throw a little light into my life. Every kind word and every encouragement from you hurts me almost as much as the oppression and injustice from which I have suffered all my life. Until I knew Mr. Strobel I knew not real kindness. I am yet unused to it, and so it seems sometimes as if you had stabbed me. But there is this difference, Miss Hilman: Whereas constant injustice deadens the heart, kindness quickens it, and I shall yet do something, you may be sure, that will not only be evidence of my sincerity and devotion, but that will actually help you."

"Mr. Litizki," returned Clara, disturbed by his morbid tone rather than by his words, which were but characteristic of his point of view, "you dwell too much upon these things, not only upon what has been evilly done to you, but upon what seems to you as exceptional goodness. Let us not think more about it until the time comes for action. Then we shall be the better prepared to think quickly and effectively. See, here we are at the depot. I will let you get my ticket for me, as you will have to go to the window also, and I will avoid the nuisance of having to wait in the line."

Litizki took her purse without a word, after she had settled with the driver, escorted her to a seat and then went to the ticket window. When he returned he displayed unusual coolness, for him, as he handed her the ticket and said:

"Poubalov will go by the same train as you. He is even now in this room, and he saw me buy the tickets. Of

course I pretended not to see him, but he despises me and cares not for all my efforts."

Clara felt no fear at this information, but it nevertheless aroused a sense of discomfort. A presentiment of misfortune she readily dismissed; this fact of being persistently "shadowed" by a man whom she believed to be her enemy she could not dismiss, and she could not shake off the irritation caused by it.

"Suppose," suggested Litizki, "that you pretend to take this train but really wait for the next one."

"No," replied Clara, "I will not be interfered with in my movements by Poubalov. I suppose it is his right to take the train, if he chooses to do so, as well as it is mine. I will go to my car now, please, and if he ventures to intrude upon me I shall know how to relieve myself of his presence."

Litizki's eyes sparkled with exultant satisfaction for just an instant, and then the fire that lit them subsided to a steady glow that would have revealed a fixed and awful purpose had anybody seen it and read it correctly. But he kept his eyes averted as he escorted Clara to the car, thinking of her words, weighing them, repeating them to himself. They sank deep into his brain, where his perceptions of life, disordered by a rankling sense of injustice, distorted them and threw them back to the surface of his thoughts with an interpretation all his own.

"She has the nature of heroes," he said to himself, "and she is capable of it! She is great, grand! How fitting that Alexander Poubalov should meet at last a foe of infinite spirit, intellect as keen as his own, courage unfaltering, and that foe a woman! But she is a woman, and her place is beside my benefactor. She must be saved for him and for herself. She must be spared this demonstration of her right to rank with heroes. I know what she is, and Strobel shall know when, Poubalov out of the way, he gains his freedom. She must be saved, and I must save her. It is my fate!"

Wholly unsuspecting of the raving that was going on in

her strange companion's mind, Clara proceeded to the car and took the chair that the porter pointed out to her. For just an instant it occurred to her to ask Litizki to sit with her, but there was nothing Quixotic in her character; she knew that the little tailor would be immeasurably hurt if she should suggest paying his traveling expenses, and, withal, he made her uncomfortable. She thought very kindly of him, but she felt no need of his protection.

"We will meet again in Boston," she said, pleasantly, "and we may yet do some work together."

"Perhaps so," responded Litizki. "I shall be on the train, and if you like I will watch outside till it starts and let you know whether Poubalov gets on board."

"It's hardly necessary," said Clara; "still, if you would rather do so, I have no objection."

Litizki, therefore, loitered on the platform beside the train until just before starting time. Then he went to Clara and told her that Poubalov had taken a seat in the car just behind hers.

"I have no fear," she assured him, "but you may look for me when we get to Boston."

She made this arrangement wholly for his sake, realizing the man's devotion and anxiety to serve her. He bowed gravely and made his way to the platform again, but instead of going to an ordinary coach he climbed the steps to the rear platform of the parlor car in which Poubalov sat.

"Can you give me a seat in this car?" he asked of the conductor as the train started.

"There's just one left," replied the official as he consulted his slips after a curious glance at the inquirer.

Litizki paid for the seat immediately. It was at the very back of the car, against the partition of the smoking room wherein Poubalov was at the time seeking the comfort he found in cigarettes.

The train had been in motion more than an hour when Poubalov appeared. He saw Litizki, and raised his brows slightly, as if in mild surprise. With no other sign of rec-

ognition he took his seat, which was in about the middle of the car.

Hours passed slowly while the train rushed on as if madly intent upon checking the flight of time. Poubalov occupied himself with a book. Litizki could not have followed the words on a printed page had he tried to do so. His brain worked over and over the idea that had found its way there days before, and he could not, if he would, have thought of anything else.

"The time matters not," he argued with himself; "as well now as at another, but there must be provocation if possible. If there is no provocation, then proceed without it. It must be done at all hazard. And there must be no failure."

Somewhere between Westerly and Providence the train came to a stop. There was trouble with the engine—what, it matters not. The train could not proceed until the damage had been repaired. A brakeman was sent forward to the next station to telegraph for assistance, and the engineer busied himself in effecting a temporary adjustment of the machinery, so that some progress could be made even though it were slow. Poubalov went forward with many passengers to watch the work, and Litizki followed him. Altogether nearly two hours were lost by the accident, so that it was dark when the train rushed through the suburbs of Boston.

Poubalov then rose and went into the car forward. Litizki went after and saw the spy drop into a chair not far from where Clara sat, her back to the window, her profile clearly in view. There were many vacant seats in the car, some unoccupied at the moment because the passengers, weary with the long journey, were standing up, making early preparations for departure. All the men were at the forward end, waiting their turns at the wash-room.

The train had just rolled past Roxbury crossing, two miles from the terminus, when Poubalov rose again and sauntered forward, sinking negligently into the chair

back of Clara which had just been vacated by a lady who was now submitting to the brush of the porter.

Litizki saw Clara start when Poubalov addressed her, and his hand sought his pocket, but he withdrew it empty when he observed that the spy had left his cane leaning against the side of the car near his former seat.

"That will do better," muttered the tailor, and he went to Poubalov's chair, took the cane in his hands, and, all unobserved by any of the preoccupied passengers, released the catch and drew forth the long blade. Concealing it by his side as he took the few remaining steps that lay between him and his victim, he presently raised it high over Poubalov's heart, and with the words, "I will do it for you, Miss Hilman!" brought it down with all his force.

Poubalov fell into the aisle with a loud gasp, and Clara, uttering one scream of terror, bent over him.

Litizki dashed to the rear platform. There was nobody in his way save one or two frightened women. The brakeman had already opened the doors of the vestibuled platform and before any one could lay hands upon him, the little tailor had swung himself off into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KEY TO IVAN'S PRISON.

The train was proceeding at such comparatively slow speed that Litizki, though he had jumped blindly and though he fell full length on the ground, was not hurt. Before the rear car had passed he was on his feet and making across the tracks. A fence too high for him to scale barred his progress, and he hurried in the direction of Roxbury, looking for some means of egress from the "yard" through which the railroad ran. He found it at last, a narrow gate in the fence at the end of a short street. The gate was unlocked, and Litizki was soon upon Columbus Avenue.

Until then he had been conscious of no especial emotion, and his course had been taken instinctively rather than with a definite purpose of effecting his escape; but instead of breathing free now that he was where for a time at least he could mingle with the passers unsuspected, a great fear came upon him. Throughout all the long journey he had nursed his awful purpose calmly and steadfastly, never for an instant wavering; now he seemed still to feel the handle of the dagger in his palm, he saw the blade flash as he poised it over Poubalov's heart, and he heard again the loud gasp with which the spy fell under the blow. Litizki trembled. His throat was parched, his skin hot, but dry as the dust on the pavement. He glanced furtively up and down the avenue, as if to see the policeman who would presently arrest him.

Litizki had paused, unable to walk without staggering, when he dropped so completely from heroism to trepidation. He grasped a trolley post for support and was dimly conscious that two or three girls who were passing laughed at him for being helplessly drunk. Half uncon-

sciously he felt in his pocket and drew forth the revolver with which he had intended to kill the spy. Should he not end his misery then and there, and cheat the hangman? He looked down at the tiny barrel, so large in its tragic possibilities, and with the thought that he had but to exercise a steady hand upon himself as he had upon Poubalov in order to plunge into oblivion, he began to recover. The grated cover of a sewer basin was at his feet and he dropped the weapon upon it. It rebounded a very little and then slipped through the grating, out of sight and out of reach. Litizki instantly wondered why he had done that.

"That was unreasonable. The revolver was not evidence," he muttered, and then a wild joy surged in his heart as he reflected that he had accomplished his purpose.

"That was no crime in the light of reason," he argued. "The necessities of the situation demanded it, and though the law will say otherwise, I am content."

He was almost himself again now, and it flashed upon him that his work, after all, was but half done. There was one other step to be taken before his heroic deed could be of service to her whom he worshiped, and to his benefactor whom he idolized. Strobel must be freed, but how? Certainly not by standing there at the curb in plain view, waiting to be arrested. No; whatever be his ultimate fate, he must effect at least a temporary escape.

Once more steadied by a purpose to strive for, Litizki crossed the avenue and walked on in the same general direction until he came to Washington Street. His delay at the curb had been brief as measured by the watch. With every step he took his brain grew clearer. He saw the folly of going to Poubalov's lodging-house in Bulfinch Place for the purpose of releasing Strobel. His conviction that Strobel was confined there had not been shaken by any of the events since his failure to expose Poubalov's secret. News of the murder would undoubtedly be taken to that house before he could get there. The release must be effected by some other hand than his own; but what mat-

ter? He had made the release possible. Miss Hilman would ever give him credit for it, and that was enough, as undoubtedly she would tell Strobel how it came to pass.

His plan of operation was fully formed when he reached Washington Street. He boarded the first Chelsea ferry car that came along, and set himself to thinking of it. When the conductor touched his shoulder to remind him of his fare, he started violently as if the avenging hand of law had been laid upon him. There was a recurrence of the dreadful fear that had momentarily possessed him, and again he shook as if with an ague. He felt an almost irresistible impulse to jump from the car and run; and when at last he left it, near the far end of Hanover Street, he had not yet recovered. With great difficulty he dragged his steps through the crowded streets of the North End until he came to the house where Vargovitch lived. As he climbed the stairs, he felt his courage return; and when Vargovitch bade him enter, he was again the somber, depressed figure with which all his acquaintances were familiar.

"Vargovitch," he said directly but with averted eyes, "I leave the country to-morrow, never to return. Do not ask me why. You will know soon enough after I have gone. See, I have so much money," and he emptied the contents of his purse upon the table. "It is enough for the present, perhaps, but I shall some day need more, and I leave behind me accounts and stock, to say nothing of business good will, that are of value. I want you to help me realize upon them."

Vargovitch looked sternly at his friend.

"That mad head of yours," he responded, "has led you at last to difficulty from which there is no exit. I will ask no questions, Litizki, but I will not be concerned in your affair. You should not have come here."

Litizki was sufficiently master of himself to repress the tremor that threatened him.

"Do you desert me, Vargovitch?" he asked, turning his dull eyes apathetically on his comrade.

"I'll accept no responsibility for what you may have done," returned Vargovitch, "I will neither harbor you nor inform upon you."

"I do not ask the one, and I know you would not do the other. I shall remain but a short time. Come! will you take my business and dispose of it for me?"

"Money cannot be raised among our people to-night."

"I know it, but you can send me some when you have collected. Let me sit down and write a moment."

Vargovitch silently placed writing materials before him, and Litizki wrote rapidly. When he had done, he handed the paper to his friend. It was a surrender of all his business property to Vargovitch, as complete a bill of sale as he could draw.

"Take it or destroy it," said Litizki; "I go now, and by and by I shall send you my address. If you have accepted the trust I impose upon you, you will send me money; if not—" The tailor shrugged his shoulders and went to the door. "It is the last time you look upon me, Vargovitch," he concluded.

"It is a wild scheme," muttered Vargovitch, looking at the document, "but we will see."

The noise of the door closing aroused him. Litizki had left the room.

On the street Litizki again had to struggle against the fear that his crime excited. All through the long night it came to him at irregular intervals, and he vibrated between an exaltation when he regarded himself as a hero, and abject cowardice when the rustling of a leaf made his very soul shiver. On this occasion, that is, after leaving Vargovitch, he staggered through unfamiliar streets and alleys, hoping that no friend would see him, and at length during a period of self-possession, he crossed the ferry to East Boston. There he took a room in an emigrant's hotel near the Cunard steamship dock. He knew that some boat of this line would depart on the morrow, the regular sailing day, and he had resolved to take passage in it.

In the office of the hotel he found that the boat was the *Cephalonia*, and that she was scheduled to start at half-past eleven. That was a late hour, and he would be in great peril until then, but there was nothing for it but to take his chances. So he gathered up a lot of writing materials and retired to his room. He spent most of the night in writing to Clara.

"In staying your hand," he began abruptly, without address of any sort, "from exacting from Alexander Poubalov the penalty of his crime against you, the penalty which your hand alone was worthy to exact, I was impelled not by egotism, or sudden emotion. It was my purpose to save you for a happier career than with all your nobility of character you could have achieved had you yourself done the deed. I shall try to escape the punishment that society would inflict upon me for this act of justice, for I find that at this moment I cling to my miserable life as does the dog whose master starves and maltreats him. If I do not escape, it will matter not at all, and I ask no tears from your beautiful eyes. I know your character so well that I shall die content with the gratitude that I know will warm your heart for your unworthy servant.

"The blow that struck away the mighty obstacle to your success and happiness was but the key to the door that is closed upon Ivan Strobel. The happiness of opening that door with my own hands is not to be for me, and I do not deserve it. I am content to show you the way.

"Poubalov's rooms are at 32 Bulfinch Place. He occupies two, possibly three rooms there, and in the sense that he has undoubtedly bought the landlady, the whole house is his. I am convinced that Strobel is confined there, and that that has been his prison house since his abduction last Monday. There will be no bar now to your going to the house and releasing your lover and my benefactor. I will tell you what room he is in, or at all events was in last Thursday night; and that you may thoroughly understand me, I will relate how I came to know this, although

in so doing I shall lay bare to you the secrets of my heart and confess to you the weak, good-for-nothing that I am—such as you yourself have found me to be. I hope my action of this evening will redeem me somewhat in your eyes.”

Here followed a detailed account of Litizki's attempted rescue of Strobel, and he mitigated none of the mortifying occurrences, freely confessing himself a child in the hands of his adversary.

“The room where Strobel was confined on that night,” he continued, “is the little one adjoining Poubalov's main room. It is directly over the hall as you enter, one flight up. I doubt very much whether Poubalov has transferred his prisoner to any other part of the house, for that would have provoked comment and perhaps suspicion among the lodgers. Your happiness, therefore, is now in your own hands, and if I escape I shall never see you again. I could almost wish that I would be taken, for the certainty that you would come to visit me in my cell; but it is my desire to relieve you of everything that might even remind you of sorrow, and I therefore take leave of you in this letter with the hope that you will act upon it without delay, and that no accident will rob you of the reward which your loyalty merits.”

He signed his name without any formal concluding phrases, and having addressed, stamped and sealed the envelope, he went out to post it. The dawn was just breaking, and he could see with sufficient clearness all about the street and the freight yard in the vicinity of the hotel. No one, apparently, was stirring save himself. Believing that Clara would get the letter sooner if he took it to a post office instead of a street box, he attempted to find one. He knew there must be a branch office in East Boston somewhere, but he knew not where to look for it. He had come to the corner of Maverick Square when he saw a policeman standing within the shadow of a building. A violent shudder came over him as he suddenly realized that he had taken one step toward the officer with a view

to asking the way to the post office! One of his fits of fear attacked him and again he staggered, but if the policeman had any thought of arresting him for drunkenness, he gave no indication of it, and Litizki stumbled on undisturbed.

When he thought he could do so safely, he turned into a doorway to recover. He saw a street letter-box within twenty feet, but as he started toward it, letter in hand, he heard a bell ringing.

"The ferry!" he muttered, and he began to run toward the river. With all his fears the little tailor kept his head faithful to his purpose. It was now in his thoughts that he would cross the river to the mainland and post his letter in the general office on Devonshire Street, whence he knew it would be taken with the least delay to Mr. Pembroke's house. He was conscious of the risk in thus showing himself even in the solitary hours of the early morning, but his courage was returning, and he felt again a hero who would brave all for her to whom he owed fealty.

The gateman at the ferry heard him running down the street and held the boat for him. Litizki sank breathless upon a bench and felt again the triumph of his deed. He reveled in the difficulties he was overcoming and the dangers that beset him.

A car was waiting at the city side of the ferry, and Litizki rode in it as far as Scollay Square. Then he walked to the post office, and remembering that a stamp window was open all night, he found it and added to his letter a "special delivery."

"Now," he muttered, dropping the important missive in the box, "it doesn't matter what happens to me."

He returned on foot by devious ways to the ferry, more than once evading marketmen and other early pedestrians as he felt the recurrence of terror, and at length came again to his hotel. The employees of the house were astir, steerage passengers were beginning to arrive, and Litizki felt a sudden repugnance to the solitude of his chamber. He sat by a window in the office and watched the groups

of men and women who gradually gathered at the entrance to the dock, waiting to go on board the *Cephalonia*, or to bid good-by to friends and relatives.

Before very long he heard the strident voice of a news boy calling his morning wares. He listened for a quotation of startling headlines, expecting that the murder of a passenger in a drawing-room car would be the great news feature of the day. Perhaps this boy had not read his papers carefully. At all events, he shouted nothing whatever concerning the event that had crowned Litizki's life and made him a hero and a coward at once.

After some hesitation the tailor bought a paper, and ran his eyes over the captions of the leading articles. He found no reference to his deed there. He examined the paper, column by column, from first page to last, and not one line set forth so much as a hint of Poubalov's tragic end.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GHOST OF POUBALOV.

Litizki laid the newspaper down and tried to reflect. He had not slept at all since he awoke from a very brief nap in New York the morning before; therefore, he had not dreamed the scene in the drawing-room car. With his own hand he had actually struck Poubalov to the heart, and his victim had fallen with the gasp and shudder of death. This was so, and no newspaper could make it otherwise; but how should it happen that the reporters had missed the episode?

It had happened upon a railroad train; what more probable, then, than that the railroad officials had suppressed the news? He had read many accounts of accidents in which the reporters set forth the reticence of officials and employees.

"They imagine," thought Litizki, "that it is not for their interest to let the public know that so violent a crime, so they would call it, could be committed in one of their high-toned cars, and that, moreover, the murderer could escape."

This thought appeased for a moment the new fear that threatened to unman him for all time, the fear that he had failed! Though he openly and emphatically repudiated all superstitions, and boasted over and again that his life and views were ruled by reason alone, he was yet subject to influences that, if they were not superstitions, were remarkably like them. Among these were his estimate of Poubalov, whose invincibility seemed to surpass human powers and attributes. Litizki was conscious of this tendency to surround the spy with a supernatural atmosphere, and he struggled against it, the result of his struggle invariably being his deeper self-abasement as he

recognized Poubalov's immeasurable superiority. Now he felt again this superhuman character of the spy appealing to him, setting his poor brain in a whirl, and blurring his eyes as if a mighty wind had taken up the dust of the street and held it suspended in a dense cloud before him.

"Bah!" exclaimed Litizki, striking his brow angrily, "he cannot"—and he stopped suddenly, conscious that he was speaking aloud. There was nobody in the room but a sleepy clerk, who looked up curiously from his ledger and then bent his head again over his work. Litizki tried to force his thoughts away from the topics that absorbed him. It occurred to him that he had eaten nothing since the morning before, and he went to the hotel restaurant. On the table at which he took a seat was a newspaper left by some previous customer. It was the same journal that had beaten its contemporaries in the first publication of the rumor, that was finally accepted as news, concerning the elopement of Strobel and Lizzie White. Litizki recalled the superior enterprise of this paper, and while waiting for his breakfast, he looked it over. Yes! there it was, and his heart bounded with joy and fear at once. It was not a long story under a half-column head, but the few lines were double-leaded, and paragraphed at every period. A newspaper man would have seen at a glance that the item had come in late, after the forms were made up, and that the editor had "lifted" a story of minor interest to make room for this. "Probable Murder," was the caption, and the statement beneath it was as follows:

"A passenger in one of the drawing-room cars attached to the New York express due at Park Square at six P.M., but some hours late last night, was stabbed just before the train reached the station.

"It is believed that the wound was mortal.

"The assailant took advantage of the excitement and confusion to jump from the train.

"No trace of him has been found.

"The name of the victim is not known at this writing.

"No rumor concerning the tragedy reaches this office until long after midnight.

"The police, to whom the railroad officials secretly reported the

affair, for reasons best known to themselves, withhold information, but they admit that the assault took place as described above.

"It is believed that the murderer will be arrested this morning.

"An extra edition giving full details of this occurrence will be published at ten o'clock."

Litizki looked cautiously around the room. A policeman in full uniform was eating at a table near the door. For one instant the tailor meditated flight through an open window. Then he pulled himself together and ate his breakfast. "We shall see," he thought, and he hastened, that he might finish ahead of the policeman and pass directly in front of him on the way to the office.

"If he is here to arrest me," reflected Litizki, "he will obey his instructions when he sees me go out. If he lets me alone, it will mean that there is still a chance for me."

The policeman did not stir when Litizki passed him. The tailor paid his bill, and, the dock being open, went to the steamship office and bought a steerage ticket for Liverpool. He was exultant once more, proud of himself as a hero.

"The next edition, and then all the papers," he thought, "will print my name, and everybody will know what I have done. When Strobel is released there will be plenty of thinking people who will applaud me in their hearts, whatever they may say aloud."

Believing that he could sleep now that his mind was relieved of uncertainty, he went down into the men's department of the steerage and crawled into a bunk away forward. A great many passengers were booked for this trip, and a compartment never used except in the event of a crowd had been fitted in the very prow of the ship. Litizki knew that the steward would not assign the bunks there until none were left elsewhere, and he hoped, therefore, to be undisturbed until after the boat had started.

So he lay down upon the coarse mattress and tried to sleep. He closed his eyes only to view again the scene in the drawing-room car. Physical fatigue caused his mind

to wander, and he would be conscious that he was dropping into sleep when suddenly his nerves would seem to be on fire with life, and he would start violently and grip the low rail of his bunk as if he were about to fall out. By dint of will power he compelled himself to remain there, although as the time passed he was in momentary expectation of arrest. He began to regret that he had shown himself so freely. Once the steamer was under way he would be able to rest undisturbed by phantasies for ten days. After that, what matter? Those ten days should be passed in full enjoyment of his one successful act.

As the forenoon dragged along the steerage filled with men, and there was a constant hum of voices, and the shuffling of feet as the passengers jostled about in the narrow quarters and stowed their baggage on and under their bunks. Several men came into Litizki's compartment and took possession in turn of the unoccupied places. Some of them remained, scraping acquaintance with one another, and passing about the liquor without copious draughts of which few ocean travelers regard a voyage as properly begun. In the saloon, champagne serves as the exhilarant for a scene that should need no wine to set healthy blood to sparkling; and in the steerage, the whisky flask accomplishes its purpose just as effectively. A fellow-passenger offered his flask to Litizki. He was no drinker, and he accepted the friendly offering more to attract no comment to himself than because he craved a stimulant.

Having mumbled "thanks, friend" and drunk as much as his throat would tolerate of the fiery stuff, he lay down again. A moment or two later he was surprised to find that he felt more composed, distinctly drowsy, in fact. He correctly attributed this to the whisky, and he lay very still in the hope that natural sleep would at last come upon him. This might have been the case, but he was aroused by a rough hand on his foot.

"Come on there, my man; come on," said a commanding voice.

"You want me, then, do you?" responded Litizki, sitting up quickly and bumping his head against the deck.

"Save the ship, man," remarked the voice, jocosely, "and it will be better for your head. That deck's made of iron. Let me see your ticket."

So it was not a policeman. Litizki showed his ticket, and the purser's assistant passed on. It must be approaching the hour of departure. The tailor, fully aroused, wished that his neighbor would offer him more liquor.

"Do you think," he asked, "that I would have time to go ashore and get a bottle of whisky?"

"Yes," was the facetious reply, "but you wouldn't have time to get back. Never mind, partner. Have a drop of this," and again the flask was passed to him.

Litizki did not lie down again immediately after drinking. He sat crouched over with his hands about his knees, wondering if Miss Hilman had received his letter. The men in his compartment were chatting and laughing noisily. The single port-hole admitted so little light that he could not have distinguished the features of any of them except by the closest scrutiny. The steerage steward looked in.

"There's one place here, sir," he said, "that your man can have."

"All right," was the reply, in a wheezy, cracked voice; "take it, Billings."

The tailor started. Was not that the name of the man whom Miss Hilman had mentioned as the driver of Strobel's second carriage? Could it be that he was taking flight, too? or was it a mere coincidence of names?

A young fellow, preceded by an odor of strong drink, and followed by a decrepit old man, edged into the compartment. He carried a black, shiny portmanteau which he threw upon the vacant bunk.

"There!" he growled, "that was heavy. Give me another swig, Mr. Dexter."

"You shall have it, my boy, and welcome," croaked the old man, producing a flask from his pocket; "take a good,

long drink. That's it! down with it, he! he! Pleasant voyage to you, Billings, my boy!"

He patted the young fellow on the shoulder; and Billings, supposing that his hand was extended to take the flask, turned his back, and when he had drunk, corked the flask and remarked thickly:

"I'll keep it thish time."

"All right, all right," responded Dexter; "you may have it now. I'm going on deck. It's too close here."

He hobbled away, and Billings staggered after him.

Full of wonder, and almost forgetting his own part in the Strobel matter, Litizki descended from his bunk and went up to the deck also. To his amazement, he found that the Cephalonia was already a hundred yards from the dock. Several conceited little tugs were puffing away at stem and stern, to turn the gigantic ship about. A great crowd of people were on the pier, waving hands and handkerchiefs, and the salutes were frantically returned by the hundreds on board who crowded close to the rail.

Billings had gone to the rail away from the shore, and Dexter stood beside him, still talking with forced jocular-ity, to which the young man listened with only half comprehension. The most that his fuddled brain could recognize was that he was on board a steamer bound for Europe, a big enough fact in itself to subdue the ordinary mind.

Litizki watched the pair with troubled curiosity. Could this be the same Billings? and could his going away portend any failure for the plan that Litizki had executed at such heroic self-sacrifice? It could not be possible! The guilty driver might well flee from punishment, but neither his presence nor his absence could materially affect the outcome.

Thinking thus, the tailor allowed his eyes to wander from Billings and Dexter, taking in the sights of the ship with indifferent interest. Suddenly he retreated a pace, and grasped a hatchway to prevent himself from sinking prone upon the deck. Were all his railings against super-

stition and the supernatural but empty words? Had he gone stark mad, or was that the ghost of Poubalov leaning negligently over the rail of the promenade deck and grinning down at him in evident amusement at his consternation?

A long cry of terror seemed to struggle for utterance in Litizki's throat, but it found vent in a pitiable whine that noobdy heard above the joyous cheering of the passengers except his frightened self. He could not take his eyes from that awful face, whose every feature seemed to glow with perfect health. How long he stood there, gasping, powerless under the terrible spell, Litizki could not have told, but a complete revulsion of feeling overcame him when the figure on the deck above shrugged its shoulders, sneered, and strode forward out of sight.

Then Litizki knew that he had failed.

Where now was all the exaltation of heroism that had sustained him? Where his devotion to Reason, that false goddess whose dictates had seemed to him infallible? Even in his agony of humiliation the light broke in upon him, and he saw that the guiding spirit of his miserable career had not been abstract, unimpeachable Reason, but a base, weak imitation—the lucubration of a disordered intellect, Litizki's reason.

The unhappy man tried to think, not so much to explain how it had happened that the dagger had not done its work, but how should he act now? There was no withdrawal from the voyage already begun, and he wished least of all to go ashore. Why had he so insanely thrown away his revolver? The breast that had resisted a knife driven by his feeble arm could not withstand the force of a well-directed bullet.

What should he do? Would fate be once more kind, just once more, and some time during the coming ten days, put Poubalov in his way so that he could push the villain overboard?

Whisky mounted to his brain and told him to hope. He crawled up the steps to the forecastle-top whence he

could command a view of the promenade deck throughout its entire length. Poubalov was there, idly observing the passing harbor. He hardly stirred until, just after passing Boston Light, the steamer's engines were stopped, and with several others, ladies and gentlemen, he went to the main deck. A tug came alongside, the visitors and the representatives of the Cunard Company crossed the plank, and in another moment the great vessel throbbed again with the revolutions of the screw that, barring accident, would not cease its work until it had propelled the steamer to the other side of the world.

Poubalov stood in front of the wheel-house of the tug and waved his hat to Litizki, and by the side of the spy stood the decrepit old man, Dexter.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LITTLE FRONT ROOM.

When Poubalov had fallen to the floor of the car and Clara was bending over him, his dark eyes shone with savage luster as he said:

"I am not hurt, Miss Hilman, but I would I were, if I could thereby gain your sympathy."

"Not hurt!" she repeated aghast at the spectacle he presented, and unable to credit his words. He lay flat on his back, and protruding upward from his closely-buttoned coat was the dagger. It looked as if half the length of the blade had been buried in his body.

The passengers gathered about, horrified and excited, while the man whom they supposed to be dying, sat up in the aisle and deliberately wrenched the blade from his bosom.

"See," he said holding it aloft where nearly everybody could observe it, "the point is badly blunted, and I shall have to grind it down, but there is no blood upon it!"

Then he laughed quietly, sprang to his feet, and with strong arms helped Clara back to her chair. She was terribly shocked by the episode, for Litizki's melancholy meditations rushed back upon her, and she seemed again to hear him promising yet to do something for her that should be of great service. And this was it!

She did not then realize that it was a remark of her own that had inspired his mad brain to action, and it was well that she did not, for it was enough that she should suffer as she did, accusing herself of failing to foresee what would happen if the little tailor were permitted to go on tormenting himself with the mystery, and indulging his immeasurable hatred of Poubalov. How could she have

been so selfish, she thought, as to encourage the unfortunate man to devote his life to her purpose, and to arouse such devotion that he was carried by it to the very commission of murder? She shuddered as the word occurred to her, and she looked appealingly at Poubalov, as if to seek from him some further assurance that the miracle had occurred to avert the tragedy that Litizki had planned.

"It is absolutely nothing, Miss Hilman," said the spy, interpreting her glance correctly, "save a hole in my coat and the probable perforation of some interesting documents. I will show you."

Having just placed her in the chair, he was bending over her as he spoke, and now he stood erect, and while all the passengers looked on amazed, he unbuttoned his coat and drew from the breast pocket a large leather wallet filled with papers.

"I wear no armor," he said, smiling as he laid the dagger on the window ledge, that he might use both hands in showing how he had escaped. One side of the wallet had the mark of the knife, a gash clean cut in the leather, evidence sufficient that the blow had fallen with all the force that Litizki could command. Opening the wallet, he took out several folded papers, showing without revealing their nature, that the blade had pierced them. At last he drew forth a little copper plate, and held it up to the light.

"Yes," he said, "that finished it. The wallet itself was almost sufficient to save me, but without this plate I think I should have been scratched a bit. I had this plate engraved a short time ago in New York, as I wished to present my card with my name printed in characters that would be intelligible to English-speaking people. The engraver gave me the plate, of course, when he delivered my cards, and at the moment I put it here for convenience. I had forgotten all about it. You see," handing the plate to a gentleman who stood beside him, "my friend managed to erase my name but he left me my life."

"You are to be congratulated," exclaimed the gentleman, returning the plate after a vain attempt to decipher

the name. The point of the dagger had completely obliterated several letters and scratched most of the rest.

Clara sat during this with her handkerchief to her lips, trying to recover her mental poise, and concentrating her mind on the fact that a tragedy had not taken place. The train rolled slowly into the station, and the passengers were speedily occupied with escaping from their confinement. One officious gentleman remarked to Poubalov:

"You will, of course, report this matter to the police? I shall be pleased to give you my card if you require a witness, although I was in the wash-room at the time you were struck down."

"Thank you," responded Poubalov, with a grave smile, "I shall not require your card, as I have no complaint to make."

"What!" blustered the passenger, "you won't have your assailant arrested? Such a man ought not to be at large."

"The railroad officials may take that view of it if they choose," said the spy, calmly; "I have no desire in the matter."

Amazed and indignant, the officious passenger hunted up an official of the company, and having insisted on a thorough investigation of the attempted murder, went home complacent in that he had done his duty as a citizen. The train-men, of course, reported what they knew of the occurrence to their chief, but the assailant had leaped from the train, the name of the victim was not known, and the result was a lame account of the episode at the nearest police station late in the evening. The police had nothing to work upon, and, therefore, said nothing of it to the reporters when they made their regular calls at the station; and when at last, very late at night, a reporter to whose ears an exaggerated rumor had come, telephoned for corroboration, the sergeant in charge could only say that something of the kind had occurred; and thus it came about that one enterprising newspaper had an excusably imperfect report of the occurrence.

Clara would have left the train without Poubalov's as-

sistance, but he took her arm in his, caught up her hand-bag, and helped her to the platform, in spite of herself. Still suffering from the shock, she realized by the close contact with him how masterful was his influence, and how by force of character alone he must accomplish quite as much in his unattractive employment as by intrigue and deceit.

"I thank you," she said faintly when she stood upon the platform; "I can go alone quite well now. I cannot tell you how glad I am that you escaped. I should have felt guilty if anything serious had happened, and I feel to blame for what has occurred."

"You mustn't borrow trouble that way, Miss Hilman," he responded, gallantly; "the sanest man might well leap to folly if he imagined that you wished him to."

"It pains me to have you make light of it," said Clara; "I assure you that I have quite recovered."

"You will permit me to hand you to a carriage, Miss Hilman? I will not intrude further, believe me."

She nodded assent, and they were about to proceed along the platform when Poubalov stepped squarely in front of her.

"Pardon me," he said earnestly, "if I do not go as far even as the carriage. I have not yet had opportunity to say what I called to tell you about Wednesday evening, or to explain why I left your house so abruptly and informally. I shall call to-morrow to complete my errand. I do not ask your permission to call, as what I would say is important, and you will want to hear it. This way, cabbyl take care of this lady. Till to-morrow, Miss Hilman."

He had moved about slightly as he spoke and now darted away with quick strides. By standing in front of her and moving as he did, he had completely concealed from her view the driver, Billings, who was walking rapidly down the platform and who passed close by them.

Mystified as usual by his strange conduct, but relieved that he was gone, Clara followed the cabman and in due time arrived safely at home. She went to bed at once, tell-

ing her cousin enough of what had occurred to show that she had endured a strain. Louise sat in her room until late at night, but Clara slept peacefully to all appearances, and seemed to require no watching. In the early morning Litizki's letter arrived, and a servant took it to Clara's room. She read it before dressing.

While it recalled the shudders with which she had viewed the possibilities of Litizki's crime, and made her conscientious soul more sensible of what she deemed her responsibility in the matter, it nevertheless awakened hope afresh in her heart. Litizki was so positive in his belief that Ivan was confined in Poubalov's lodging-house, that she was well nigh convinced by his assurances, crazy though his brain undoubtedly was; but there were Poubalov's own utterances on that night when the little tailor had started to open the door to the hall room. They were not direct, but was ever Poubalov direct save when telling a straightforward lie? He had prevented Litizki from opening that door, and were not his ambiguous words susceptible of the interpretation that Ivan was, as Litizki had said, confined there, bound and gagged?

She read and reread again the parts of the letter that had reference to this clew, and decided that it would be wrong not to act upon Litizki's suggestions. She was resolved that nothing she would do should be calculated to precipitate another tragedy, but rescue her lover she must, and she set herself to thinking how it could be done.

When she was dressed, she went to her cousin's room, and Louise was surprised to be awakened by Clara, who looked none the worse for her extraordinary adventures.

"I'm not going to ask you how you are this morning," said Louise, with mock resentment; "I couldn't look as well as you do if I employed a trained nurse the year round."

"Perhaps I look better than I feel, dear," responded Clara; "but I confess that, in spite of everything, I do feel hopeful. Here is a sad letter from poor Litizki. Read

it, and tell me if, underneath all his terrible madness, there is not some ground for hope."

Louise read with awe-struck attention, and laid the long letter down with a shudder of horror.

"How dreadful!" she exclaimed under her breath, "and yet with what perfect clearness he expresses himself! No rambling, few repetitions, everything directly to the point as he sees it."

"That is the way it impresses me. Litizki was not all mad. Would it not be madness in us to ignore his information?"

"Indeed it would! what will you do?"

"Do you know Paul Palovna's address?"

"No, but Ralph would."

"I shall write a note to Paul. Get right up, please, and write to Ralph, telling him to see that my note reaches Paul as soon as possible. Of course, we cannot follow poor Litizki's plan, for he believed that he had killed Poubalov. How he must suffer! But we can investigate his theory, at all events, in our own way."

The letters they wrote were taken to Ralph Harmon by a servant, and shortly before noon Paul appeared at Mr. Pembroke's house, in answer to Clara's summons. Her uncle had returned to Boston as he had planned, but he had sent word that he should not be able to come home until some time in the evening. So, again, Clara was thrown upon her own resources for guidance and action.

Clara went over the whole situation with Paul, who expressed his regret that she had not sooner called upon him for assistance.

"Not," he said, "that I could have done anything better than you have, but that I should have liked to help."

"Events have happened too rapidly," she replied, "to make it possible for me to think of more than each episode as it occurred. I don't want you to take a step in this if it is to be at the cost of the slightest danger to yourself."

"There is no danger," said Paul; "I do not underrate Poubalov's capacity for evil, but he has no reason to work

against me. I doubt if he would recognize me, though he probably knows my name as that of Strobel's most intimate friend. As I understand it, you wish me to make a thorough investigation of Poubalov's house."

"Yes, it should have been done days ago, and I would have seen to it had Litizki told me of his experience there."

"It will be very simple. I will go there to look for rooms. Even if he should be there, and see me, he cannot well prevent me from going through the house. I will report to you before the day is over."

Clara had not shown Litizki's letter to Paul, but she told him enough about it and its contents to convince him that the tailor had been on the right track. He was in feverish haste to get downtown and effect a solution of the mystery at once, and he more than half believed that he should succeed.

His hope that Poubalov would not be in at the time of his call was realized, of course, for the spy was at that time on his way up the harbor after bidding the Cephalonia bon voyage. A scrubwoman answered his ring at 32 Bulfinch Place and left him standing in the hall while she went for the landlady.

Paul had observed that the window just over the door was concealed by the blinds, whereas every other window on the front of the house was fully exposed.

"I have several rooms vacant," said the landlady as she came jingling a bunch of keys from a back room. She was a stout, good-humored-looking woman whose pleasant face, a little hardened by business dealings, perhaps, did not suggest the duplicity that would be essential to an alliance with such a man as Poubalov. "What kind of a room do you want?"

Paul thought he would look at them all.

"I don't mind the price so much," he said, "as the way the room strikes me."

"Well," responded the landlady with a sigh, "if you

want a five-dollar room, I'd like to save climbing stairs to show those at two dollars. Come on."

"There's a room for five," she said, opening the door of the back room up one flight. It was the room adjoining that occupied by Poubalov. "The others on this floor are occupied."

"This little front room, too?" asked Paul, his hand on the door. He had quietly tried it and found it locked before she answered in the affirmative and started up the next flight.

They looked at every room in the house above the second floor. Some of them were occupied, but the landlady opened the doors and looked in. Paul noticed that the only locked door was the one to the front hall room next to Poubalov's.

"Well," said the landlady at last as they stood on the landing beside Poubalov's door, "do you see anything you like?"

"Yes," answered Paul, "I'll take this back room," and he took a five-dollar bill from his pocket and gave it to her. He said he would occupy the room at once, and the landlady gave him a house key.

While this transaction was in progress, a young woman came up the stairs, humming a tune with that nonchalance that indicates familiarity with one's surroundings, opened the door of the little front room with a key she took from her purse, and went in, leaving the door open until she had thrown back the blinds.

"She's been with me a year and a half," remarked the landlady, complacently, "and I don't believe you could hire her to occupy any other room."

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT PAUL PALOVNA SAW.

Paul was not disheartened by his discovery, or by the landlady's comment. He believed that she was telling the truth, and that the door that Litizki supposed to communicate with the little front room really opened into a huge closet, a convenience with which the old-fashioned house abounded. He had paid a week's rent, and he determined to get some good out of it. Accordingly, he returned to his regular quarters, and packed a bag with personal effects, as if he were going upon a journey. This he took down to the room in Bulfinch Place. He saw the landlady again as he entered.

"By the way," he said, "is there any communication between my room and the one in front?"

"No," she replied; "there's a door there that was put in years ago when a family occupied the whole of that floor, but it is nailed up. It won't open from either side, so you needn't be afraid. There's a very quiet gentleman in the front room, so you won't be disturbed."

"All right, thanks," responded Paul, thinking that in due time he might make good use of the landlady's proclivity for gossip. He went to his room and studied the disused door attentively. There was a keyhole, but it was securely plugged. He lay upon the floor and peered under, but the door came close down upon the threshold, and nothing was to be seen.

"It's a disagreeable expedient," he muttered, "but the end justifies the means in this case. I won't say anything to Miss Hilman about it, though."

He opened his bag and took out a gimlet that he had bought on the way to his permanent room. Then he drew

a chair to the door, stood upon it, and began to bore, starting at a level with his eyes, and slanting slightly downward. His notion was that Poubalov would not be so likely to observe the tiny hole if it were a foot or two above his head as if it were lower. For the same reason he bored very close to the edge of a panel, and he took great care not to let the gimlet more than pierce the further side of the wood. It would never do to let any fresh dust show on the carpet in Poubalov's room.

After frequent experiments, to observe how far he had penetrated, he found that he could faintly discern the light from Pouablov's windows when he placed his eye close to the door and shaded it with his hands. Then he took a rusty nail that he pulled from the wall of his closet, and, working it patiently with his fingers, pushed it through the partially-bored hole until half its length must have protruded into the other room. A little more effort and he could put the nail in place and withdraw it without the slightest noise. Among the trifles that had accumulated in his possessions was an unframed lithograph representing cupids throwing flowers as big as themselves at one another. He could hardly remember how he came to have it; some young lady sent it to him, probably, as long ago as last Valentine's Day; but there it was, with a neat little card attached; and he hung it on the nail to excuse his operation should the landlady happen to notice it. There were plenty of hooks in the room, but he would tell her that it was his fancy to embellish the door.

"There," he thought, as he contemplated his finished work, "if our spy is not more observing and suspicious than I think he is, I shall be able to take a look at him occasionally."

Having carefully cleaned up the slight litter he had made, he locked the door of his room and went to make his report to Clara.

He told her frankly that he believed Litizki had been mistaken about the little front room. "But," he added, "I have taken the back room for a week, and I shall be sur

prised if I do not make some discovery before my time is up."

Intent upon being on the ground, where he could watch every movement of Poubalov, he hurried back to Bulfinch Place, and sat himself down to pass time with books until the spy should come in.

All day long Clara heeded her uncle's injunction to rest, but that was because there was nothing she could do. Moreover, she expected Poubalov, and she was more than anxious to be at home to receive him. He came about five o'clock. The young ladies were refreshing themselves with tea, and Louise, who never ceased to be amazed at her cousin's proceedings, almost gasped when she saw Clara greet him cordially and hasten to get a cup for him.

One would not have expected Poubalov to show fatigue, if he ever felt it, but if he were not weary on this occasion, something had occurred to disturb him. His eyes were heavy, his accent harder to understand than usual, and it was not until several minutes had passed, and he had drank freely of tea, that he spoke with anything like his customary masterful confidence. Clara led the conversation at the start. After the first greetings she referred to the episode in the car, saying:

"I should have thought you would suffer as I did from the shock of that terrible assault. It was dreadful to look at, and how much more dreadful to be the intended victim."

"You are mistaken, Miss Hilman," responded the spy; "the very shock of the blow convinced me that I was unharmed. There was therefore no more occasion for alarm on my part than as if a book had fallen from the rack upon my head."

"But, really, I supposed the worst had happened," insisted Clara, "for you not only fell but you gasped——"

"Naturally. To put it roughly, the fellow knocked the breath out of me."

"And have you heard nothing of Litizki?"

Poubalov looked at her gravely as he answered:

"I have seen him."

"Seen him!" echoed both his listeners, and "where?" asked Clara.

"He was not under arrest," answered Poubalov; "he was free, as free as he ever will be with the memory of the recent past to haunt him, as it certainly will. You will never see him again"—he raised his hand deprecatingly; "pardon me, I did not mean to suggest the slightest discomfort. He has not committed suicide, and I do not know that he contemplates it."

He turned his attention to his tea, and both young ladies were silent for a moment. Then Louise found an excuse for withdrawing, and Clara was left alone with the inscrutable foe to her happiness. There was a marked pause after Louise had gone, Clara waiting for Poubalov, and the spy—who can tell what was coursing through his mind? At length he set down his cup, and with an attempt at the aggressive self-possession that usually characterized his demeanor, he said:

"I owe you an explanation, Miss Hilman."

"Only one?" she asked coldly, but there was a strange smile on her face.

"Many," responded the spy, and there was an expression on his features, in his bearing, in the tones of his voice, that, but for the circumstances, might have been credited to sincerity. He was either not his usual self, or he was playing a much deeper game than any he had yet revealed. "Many," he repeated, "and they will all be made in due time. Do you see that I honor you in the highest way that is possible for me? I mean by not treating you to the customary forms of courtesy which are the more or less transparent garments of falsehood. I do not come here with a plausible story to account for my conduct, asking you to accept it as an apology whether you believe it, or not. I tell you the truth, so far as I speak at all; and when the nature of the case would compel me to lie if I opened my lips, I am silent."

"Or you evade the question," interposed Clara, and

again she smiled provokingly, but there was no invitation to feel at ease in her expression. Poubalov did not misinterpret it, and it almost seemed as if he, the master mind, were discomposd.

"Perhaps I do," he admitted after a moment; "my habits of speech are not such as conduce to absolute candor even with you, whom I respect too highly to consciously deceive. Tell me, Miss Hilman, will you not, can you not believe that I tell you the truth?"

"I have thought about it a great deal," replied Clara steadily, "and sometimes I almost think you do; but, you know, you have really had very little conversation with me."

"True enough, and I must confess that I never found it so hard to take my part in a conversation as I do at this minute. I usually lead it, I may say dominate it," and he smiled a little; "usually, you see, I make people, men and women, believe me. I would beg you to, Miss Hilman, if only I knew how."

"Why try to compel me to stand on the same plane as you do?" asked Clara; "you confess your habits of deceit. How can I promise to believe you without confessing that, for this moment at least, I accept your own style of intercourse?"

"You are an invincible logician, Miss Hilman," exclaimed Poubalov, compressing his lips. "I give up, and will let my words stand or fall on their merits, according as you judge them. I came here on Wednesday evening to tell you some things I had discovered. The man Billings called before I had begun to speak. I departed unceremoniously, because I did not wish to meet him."

"I know that," said Clara, simply. "I knew it at the time."

"Of course you did," responded Poubalov, crestfallen; "you could not infer otherwise, and my confession has all the appearance, therefore, of a pitiaibly weak attempt to bolster up my claim to veracity."

"I do not interpret it that way. I can make my own test

of your veracity. I shall listen to whatever you have to say, without reference to what you call a confession."

"Well, then," resumed the spy, speaking rapidly, "this is what I came to say. I had made investigations in my own way along the lines of the theory laid down with respect to the possible operations of Nihilists against Mr. Strobel. I caught Litizki shadowing me, and recognized him as one with whom I had come in official contact in Russia. It seemed to me child's play to deal with him, for I had no respect for his intellect. I supposed at first that he was tracking me as the agent of a Nihilistic society. Then I learned that he was devoted to Strobel. I knew he would come to see me, but not openly. So I sat up for him, and he crept into the house like a thief. We had a conversation that I will not pause to detail. I did my best to impress him with my power, and then let him go away, for I wanted him to be at large, and I did not want him just then to report to you what I had told him. You see, I purposely allowed him to nurse his suspicions of me. Next day I called at his shop, my sole purpose being to learn who his associates were, and to endeavor to fasten upon them the taking off of Strobel. Among the men in his shop was one Boris Vargovitch, at one time somewhat of a leader among the Nihilists. The rest that I was going to say on that evening I do not need to say now, for I have since become convinced that Litizki was acting irresponsibly in pursuing me, and that if Nihilists were active, he was not in their confidence. Furthermore, I am now convinced that neither Vargovitch nor any other former Nihilist in Boston was concerned in the Strobel matter. I was mistaken in supposing that the Nihilists continued their close organization in this country. They may send revolutionary literature to Russia, but they do not keep up active operations here. I withdraw my innuendoes against them, therefore, and have to confess that you are now just as far along in your painful search as you were five days ago."

Clara was deeply impressed by this narration. She could

see no flaw in it, no evidence of untruthfulness. But there was a touch of evasion in the conclusion, and she remarked with merciless coolness:

"You do not say that we are as far along as five days ago. You confine the lack of progress to me."

There was a hasty glance from the spy that looked like apprehension.

"Of course, I catch the significance of your words," he said; "you think I know more than I tell, that I instigated the abduction of Strobel."

"Tell me," she said, looking straight into his eyes, "why did you not wish to meet Billings?"

He hesitated, and the color rose slowly to his cheeks.

"No," he answered, "not now. I have said all I can for the present. I am still pursuing this matter, Miss Hilman, but I must put off further information. I would ask you to trust me to report faithfully to you but that it is such a farce for two persons like you and me to bandy words."

"It is a cruel farce," she exclaimed, rising indignantly; "you pretend to help me and you laboriously tell me things I already know."

She walked across the room, and her brain struggled for a plan in the confusion of impulses, hopes and fears. What might Paul accomplish? Would she not surely lose a possible point by dismissing the spy once and for all, and might she not some day gain much by keeping in some sort of communication with him? This was the policy she had determined upon, and she would adhere to it. So she turned and faced him. He had risen, waiting her word of dismissal or encouragement.

"I will give you one more opportunity to tell me the whole truth and make amends," she said sternly; "I believe what you have told me to-night. Next time I must have all, and nothing short of it. Will you come to-morrow?"

"Yes, Miss Hilman, in the evening."

He bowed gravely and left the house.

Paul did not venture to go to dinner when evening

came. He read on and on, waiting to hear Pouablov enter the adjoining room. It was late in the evening when at last he heard the door open and close, and he knew that the spy was at home.

Then Paul laid down his book and stepped cautiously upon the chair by the door. He carefully drew out the nail and applied his eye to the hole. He commanded a view of the very center of Poubalov's room.

The spy had thrown himself into a chair, and was sitting as if deeply wrapped in thought. There were wrinkles in his brow and his lips were set close together.

After a few moments thus, he took his traveling bag from the bureau and unlocked it. Having fumbled over the contents, he drew forth a cabinet photograph that he took directly under the chandelier where the light was strongest. His back was partially turned to Paul, and he held the card so that the observer at the nail hole could see it distinctly.

With a shock of surprise Paul recognized it as a picture of Clara Hilman.

Poubalov gazed long and earnestly at it and then touched it reverently to his lips.

CHAPTER XXII.

POUBALOV'S REVOLUTION.

Paul's heart seemed to stand still as he reflected on Poubalov's act. The original purpose of the spy in calling upon Strobel and instigating his abduction, was as much a mystery as ever, but it was one that could be explained on the ground of Poubalov's confessed relations with the government with which Strobel had been in conflict. There was nothing personal in that; but here was an element of personal relationship that might lead to worse than complications.

Poubalov in love—no! not that sacred word; infatuated, rather, with Clara Hilman.

What hope could there now be that the spy, having some day accomplished the purpose for which he had crossed the ocean to find Strobel, would set him free? In the very hopelessness of his passion would he not first murder Strobel, and then Clara herself? Paul felt sick with horror as the possibility of these tragedies occurred to his mind. They were more than possible. With Poubalov's character in view, they seemed like certainties. What could be done to avert them? What would Clara say? How revolting, more than terrifying, would be the revelation that this subtle, conscienceless foe had dared to love her!

At first blush Paul felt that he could not tell Clara what he had seen. If there were only something that he himself could do to solve the mystery of Ivan's disappearance, for only Strobel's presence in perfect health could serve to check the spy's villainous course. He held absolute command of the situation as long as he succeeded in keeping Strobel in hiding. As the sense of his helplessness grew

upon him, like an insidious vine whose twining tendrils choke the growth of a sapling, Paul wondered that poor Litizki's devotion had not the sooner driven him to madness.

He saw that, with all its evils, the situation must be made clear to Clara. He would continue his observations during the next forenoon, and then report to her.

Poubalov had said that he would call in the evening; Clara, therefore, in the early afternoon went to see Mrs. White. She went with no purpose of accomplishing anything in the mystery, but rather as an act of kindness to report how she had found Lizzie; but as she was about to turn into Ashburton Place, she saw Paul at the foot of the hill and she waited for him to come up. He had just started for Roxbury.

"I have something to tell," he said in answer to her anxious look of inquiry, "but I fear it is nothing that will be helpful, and it will certainly be disagreeable."

"I was going to call on Mrs. White," responded Clara; "suppose you go with me; but you can tell me what you have discovered before we go in."

"If you think best," and Paul hesitated.

"I do. Have no fear of me. Have I not learned to endure anything that can happen?"

"Poubalov loves you, Miss Hilman."

Clara blushed very faintly, looked straight into Paul's eyes for an instant, then off at the house-tops, and answered:

"I felt it. How did you find out?"

Amazed and relieved, Paul told her.

"I have made myself a spy," he concluded, "but I felt that the circumstances justified me."

"So I think, too," rejoined Clara. "Well, let us go on. I don't know at this moment how to act, but I cannot help thinking that this will bring matters to a crisis, and I hope, in spite of reason and fears, that it will end happily. I wonder where Poubalov got my photograph."

Then she remembered that when the reporter, Shaugh-

nessey, had returned her photograph, it had been placed for the moment upon the mantel in the drawing-room. The next day she had looked for it, and, not finding it at once, had supposed that Louise or a servant had put it away. In the stress of events she had thought no more about it; but Poubalov's call and bareheaded flight had occurred after the return of the photograph, and the natural and satisfactory explanation, therefore, was that he had stolen it.

"There is one more thing," added Paul as they walked along, "and I suppose it shows that in order to circumvent this man one must have sleepless eyes and untiring vigilance. As soon as Poubalov went to bed last night, I hurried out and got supper. It didn't take me long, for I was anxious to get to sleep, so that I might get up early enough this morning to keep track of him. I rose before six, and took a preliminary peep through my nail hole. Poubalov had gone, and up to just now, when I left, had not returned."

"I think there is nothing lost," said Clara; "he is to call on me this evening, and your discovery makes it certain that he will come. If you will come out to the house ahead of him, I should like it ever so much if you would follow him when he goes away."

They were at Mrs. White's door, and Paul preferred not to go in. There was nothing more to be said, and it seemed better that he should return to Bulfinch Place, to observe Poubalov's doings, should he return.

Mrs. White, comparatively free from anxiety about her daughter, seemed more than desirous of talking about Mr. Strobel.

"I had a letter from Lizzie last night," she said, "and she told me how kind you were. I'm real glad you went to see her, 'cause it must make you feel so much more satisfied to know that Mr. Strobel did not run away with her.' And you know, Miss Hilman, I can't quite think that the dark gentleman, Mr. Pou—something, has anything to do with it. He seems such a perfect gentleman."

"It is very hard to understand it all," responded Clara; "but what makes you think Poubalov is better than we have thought him?"

"Two or three things. Lizzie wrote me that he called to see her just after you had gone away, and she says he seemed real earnest about trying to find Mr. Strobel, and was just as polite as could be."

"Doesn't she say anything more about his call than that?"

"No, except that he spoke very kindly, and didn't let her think that he had suspected her of anything wrong."

"I should say not," remarked Clara, rather bitterly; "no one would know better than he that Lizzie was not concerned in the affair."

"I don't see why, Miss Hilman. Why shouldn't he think what other people thought? I'm afraid he did, for last Thursday evening he called here, and we had a real good talk about it. He seemed——"

"Did you tell him I had gone to New York?" interrupted Clara, sharply, for she was impatient with these ingenuous statements of what Poubalov seemed to be.

"Land sakes, no!" replied Mrs. White, "but he told me he was going on, and when he suggested so kindly that he would look up Lizzie, and let me know how she was situated, I was glad to give him her address. He hasn't been here since, though. Perhaps he hasn't got back yet."

Clara wondered wearily how stupidity should manage to flourish in a world where people have to struggle so hard against one another, and then she immediately reproached herself for the thought, recalling what a taxing puzzle Poubalov's character presented to herself. She made no effort to undeceive Mrs. White—how could she with so little as she herself actually knew?—but rather turned the conversation into simple channels until she took her departure.

Paul arrived at Mr. Pembroke's about six o'clock, reporting that Poubalov had been absent all day until late

in the afternoon, and that when he came in he immediately began preparations for going out again.

"I came along at once," said Paul, "lest he should get here ahead of me."

Clara asked her uncle if he would like to meet the spy.

"No," he answered uneasily; "what good purpose would it serve?"

"I thought that perhaps you might read him better than I can," said Clara; "I don't see how we can help coming to a crisis this evening, and if you could help, we might bring about the release of Ivan all the sooner."

Mr. Pembroke was careworn, and all his utterances and actions had been marked by indecision since his return from New York.

"I am afraid I can do no good," he said with a sigh; "handle the situation as best you can, Clara. I believe you will find your happiness restored to you shortly."

With that he shut himself in his library, and they saw no more of him that night.

Poubalov acted more like himself than he did the day before, but it was apparent to Clara that his confident self-possession was maintained by an effort.

"Must we begin where we left off yesterday?" he said by way of introduction.

"You may begin where you please," responded Clara, "but you must tell me the truth. I think you are going to do so, Mr. Poubalov."

"I cannot remember that I have told you a single lie since I met you, Miss Hilman. It must be a strange admission for you to hear me make, that I am not certain when I have spoken truly and when falsely; but that is the fault of the peculiar work that my emperor has set me to do, and it is not due in the present instance to any purpose of deceiving you. I am going to begin by telling you of a discovery that I have made since I began to work on this case—a discovery that to me, at least, is startling.

"My experience throughout all my life has been such as to make me believe that honesty and sincerity did not ex-

ist save in the characters of simple-minded people whom it would be too harsh to call fools, and yet who are nothing short of fools when you look at them from the point of view of self-interest and material advancement. What have I found to be the chief requisite of leadership, whether in guiding the state, or seeking to wreck it, or in commerce? Craft, Miss Hilman, craft that suggests and includes indirect methods to attain ends, the holding out of false hopes, the display of the gilded side of things, the concealment of the base material—in short, trickery, which is but another name for treachery. I have believed that keen minds saw the folly of what we call honesty, and to find candor in a person of intelligence would have seemed to me an anomaly. I have discovered that extraordinary combination, Miss Hilman, and have been stupefied to find that my methods, however subtle, have availed nothing in opposition to this unaffected, unconscious honesty. It is a revelation to my mind that threatens to effect a revolution in my convictions."

"One moment, Mr. Poubalov," interrupted Clara; "your habit of circuitous approach to a point is still strong upon you, and according to your own admissions, it is out of place in conversation with me. Permit me, then, to help you adjust yourself to your incomplete revolution, and I will do so without any clever turns of phraseology. I am, then, the embodiment of this wonderful candor that you have discovered. It would have taken you a long time to say it. I appreciate the compliment. Go on, please."

There was a suspicion of a tremor in Poubalov's voice as he continued:

"Yes, you have said it, beating me, as usual, in the one part wherein I thought I was skilled. But I have to add, Miss Hilman, that having discovered the existence of honesty associated with the highest order of intelligence, I am astounded to find that I not only do not scorn and despise it, I admire it—more than that, I am conquered by it; I yield to it as a serf to the will of his master, and I

worship her who—"his voice failed him for an instant and then he concluded, "you, Miss Hilman."

Clara sat looking calmly at the spy, much as if she were regarding a play in which he was an actor, or, as it seemed to him, as if she were studying a strange anatomical specimen.

"This must be a remarkable experience for you," she said simply.

"It is a marvel!" he responded with great emphasis; "I, who knew only loyalty to my czar, find that there is something more potent to stir me than his beck, or his reward. I love, and with all the strength of my being!"

"It doesn't seem at all strange to me," she murmured, her voice low and musical; "I have never rated you as less than a human being, though at times you have seemed to fall infinitely below the standard of such men as it has been my good fortune to know."

Poubalov winced at this merciless thrust at his intense egotism, and Clara went on:

"What I do not understand is why you should have been to the mortifying pains of telling me about it, for it is a farce for such persons as you and me to bandy words. Has your revolution so far progressed as to convince you that it is worth while to waste energy?"

"A man must speak out when he loves as I do," said Poubalov, desperately. "I will not rave, as I have read that lovers do; I will stick to my logic; but I must confess that when I awakened to this emotion, I could not help a day dream in which I saw you by my side, and the sight was sweet, it was inspiring, for it cannot be often that minds of such caliber as ours are brought together and united for life."

"It will be better to return to your logic, Mr. Poubalov," said Clara, gently; his tones were passionate in spite of his evident effort, and she had no desire to lead him on to a freer outburst. "Let us dismiss this experience of yours, in which, of course, I share only as a disinterested spectator. What have you done with the man I do love?"

Poubalov rose, and Clara expected to see him pace up and down the room after the manner of her uncle when he was agitated; but the spy stood before her trembling in every limb.

"You have asked me the wrong question, Miss Hilman," he said hoarsely, "and I shall not answer it."

"Then," exclaimed Clara, "either leave me at once, or proceed in your own way to tell me what I wish to know. I have been days in my search, and I can listen to you for the whole of this evening if it is necessary in order to learn what I must know."

"Suppose I should tell you," said Poubalov, slowly, "that I can lay my hands upon Strobel at any moment. What would you say?"

"I should bid you to bring him to me."

Poubalov shook his head.

"I should not do it," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT ONE O'CLOCK A. M.

Clara rose at this and faced her adversary, speaking with intensity no less than his:

"It discredits your boasted intelligence," she said, "to presume so much as to suggest a compromise to me. There can be no middle course. You do not care that I consider you an unspeakable villain, but you must see that you are bound to do one thing or the other. Bring my lover to me, or—it would be idle boasting to say what the alternative would be, but you know that I should never cease to pursue you. In my own way I should certainly circumvent you some day."

"Yes, you would, I believe that; but, Miss Hilman, I decline to accept your first alternative," and he strode toward the door.

"Stop!" she cried, running forward and getting in his way. "I told you this would be your last opportunity to tell me the whole truth. You haven't told me anything yet that I want to know. I meant what I said. I will not have you come here again."

"Nevertheless, we shall meet again, Miss Hilman."

Poubalov now appeared imperturbable. He had confessed to a certain weakness and defeat; in the presence of excitement and insistence he was easily the master of himself and the situation.

Clara realized quickly that she had lost a point by yielding even momentarily to her emotions, and she strove to recover by assuming once more what Poubalov called her logical position.

"You have said that you love me," she said as calmly as possible; "can you ask me to believe that when you delib-

erately cause me the most cruel grief? Is that consistent? With all your confessed craft, you have a certain half-respectable consistency, for you confess to me at least, how base you are. Will you, then, love and torture me, too?"

The spy became deathly pale for an instant, and then answered:

"We shall see. I have made my confession, and nothing now shall swerve me from accomplishing my purpose in my own way."

"Is there such a thing as love of fair play in you?" asked Clara, her emotions now quelled and every instinct alive once more to fencing with her adversary.

"I suppose not, except in an argument. Even then it might not seem to be fair play to the party who found himself overmatched."

"In your arguments with me you do not treat me with the ordinary fairness of admitting me to a common ground with you. You withhold facts without which I cannot argue as well as I might."

"That, Miss Hilman, is because our contest is over a real issue, not over an abstraction."

"I don't wonder that poor Litizki regarded you as a fiend!"

"Therein you manifest yourself a woman. You long for invective, but your refinement cannot teach you how to use epithets effectively."

"This is the end of talking," said Clara, moving away; "I will not detain you."

Poubalov promptly bowed ceremoniously, bade her good-evening, and left the house.

Paul slipped out after him, and tried his ability at playing "shadow."

Clara was greatly disturbed by her interview with Poubalov, although it had added nothing to her knowledge of the circumstances with which she was blindly battling. She felt like retiring at once, for she was exhausted, but there was a fresh call upon her strength within a few minutes of the spy's departure. This time it was the man

whom she knew only by his first name, "Mike," who had been sent from the livery stable to take Ivan to the wedding. He was an uncouth, illiterate young man, the most violent contrast imaginable to her recent visitor, but also the most welcome, for there could be no manner of doubt as to his simple honesty. Clara found it a relief to talk with him apart from the fact that his message was one that stirred her with new hope and stimulated her weary brain to new plans for Ivan's deliverance.

"I was to say to ye," said Mike, "how I'd had me eyes an' more, too, last night, on the feller what did the trick to me wheel."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Clara eagerly; "but what do you mean? Did somebody send you to tell me?"

"Yes'm, me boss. I told me boss about it, an' he says you go to Miss Hilman with that, an' tell her all about it, an', says he, if it's anything that can be useful to her you can do, do it, says he."

"You must thank him for me," said Clara. "Now tell me, please, how and where you saw this man, and what he said. I won't interrupt you."

"It's not me as would like to tell you what he said, miss. He wasn't speakin' to a lady, an' I'm thinkin' a lady wouldn't 'a' give him the cause to curse as I did."

Mike grinned in enjoyment of some retrospect that Clara thought she could imagine, and she smiled and waited patiently for him to tell his story in his own way.

"It was last evenin', miss, at the corner of Dover an' Washington streets. I was done with me work for the day, an' was standin' in a saloon by the bar, havin' a drop of beer by myself, when this loafer came in. He stood alongside o' me an' called for something, I don't mind now what, for I was onto him, an' was thinkin' to meself would I thump him, or would I have an argyment. I was lookin' straight at him, me hand on me beer glass, an' I suppose he noticed me for that, for pretty soon he turns around an' with a kind of a start, 'Hello!' says he.

"Now I don't know what would 'a' happened if he

hadn't spoke, for I would 'a' spoke to him, an' it might 'a' been all the same, but I was that mad all of a sudden, that I let the beer fly in his face. With that he jumped on me an' we had a fine fight, till the bartenders came round an' chucked us both into the street. They was a policeman near by, so we quit fightin,' an' went to another bar where we had a drink an' got friendly. He was already pretty full, miss, an' I was as sober as I am now, an' after three or four more drinks he got to talkin' confidential about that wheel."

Clara was on the qui vive with anxiety to know just what had occurred between Mike and his acquaintance, while at the same time she felt repugnance to basing any serious efforts upon the words of a drunken man, a swell as distrust as to the value of a clew from such a source; but she felt, too, that she could stop at nothing in the emergency that confronted her. So she asked, "What did he say, Michael?"

"First off he was for denyin' that he had anythin' to do with it; but bymeby, seein' as I wasn't mad any more, an' enjoyin' the trick of it himself, he told me he done it, 'an' I know what became of your man,' says he. 'An' what?' says I. With that, though, he shut up. He winked his eye, an' talked about somethin' else, an' I, not thinkin' or caring very much at the time, didn't ask many questions. But this mornin' I was thinkin' it over, an' wonderin' what became of th' gentleman, an' thinkin' there must be something crooked, or they wouldn't 'a' took me wheel off, an' so I told me boss an' he told me to tell you."

"It was very kind of you both," said Clara grateful, yet fearful that the point of most importance had been lost.

"Was his name Billings?"

"No'm, 'twas Patterson. Him an' me was together for some time after the fight, an' I walked along home with him."

"You know where he lives then?"

"Not exactly, miss, but I could go pretty near to it. You see, we was goin' along Washington Street toward

Roxbury, and had come a long way from Dover, when he turns down a side street, an' then another, an' I kep' along for I hadn't anything better to do. He'd been silent for a while, an' suddenly he stops an' says, tryin' hard to brace up. 'You mustn't come any further,' says he. 'Why not?' says I, half minded to give him another lickin', only he was too full. ' 'Cause me boss says he will——' but never mind what he said his boss would do. I said I didn't care, an' turned back. He went on, an' then I was minded to see where he went. Of course it was dark, an' I couldn't be certain, but I think I could go straight to that building."

"Will you take me there?" asked Clara.

"Now, miss?"

Clara reflected. Other objections aside, it might be the worst possible policy to move prematurely in the matter. It might be a false clew, she knew nothing about the building, and meantime Paul was following Poubalov. Much as she longed for immediate action, it seemed wiser to postpone it until an investigation could be made.

"Would your employer spare you to help me to-morrow forenoon?" she asked.

"I think he would, miss. He told me to do what you said, says he——"

"Tell him, please, that I would like to have you go with me to-morrow as soon after nine o'clock as you can get here. I shall want you to show me the building, and identify the man Patterson."

"That I will, miss, if he's served you any trick."

Poubalov walked very rapidly after he left Mr. Pembroke's. He could have saved himself many steps by taking a street-car, but he evidently preferred energetic action.

Paul, following, took note, as Litizki had done on a similar occasion, of the streets through which he passed, and at last he saw him pause and stand for several minutes at the curb, looking across the road at what seemed to be an old-fashioned hotel. After a time he walked

slowly on, and soon thereafter was joined by a man with whom he conversed.

Paul went near enough to see the man's face, but he did not recognize him as anybody he had ever seen before. The conversation finished, Poubalov continued on his way, again walking rapidly, but this time, after coming to Washington Street, he boarded a downtown car. An open car was directly behind it, and Paul found a place on its front seat, thus being enabled to keep the spy in view until he alighted at Scollay Square.

The guilty as well as the innocent must eat, and supper was the next thing to engage Poubalov's attention. Paul improved the opportunity in the same way, but he finished quickly, and waited a long time for the spy to come forth. He had been watching the restaurant entrance from a doorway across the street, and at last he ventured over to see whether possibly his quarry had escaped him. No; there sat Poubalov, at a table not far from the door, his head bent down as if he were thinking profoundly. His supper lay almost untouched before him. Just as Paul looked in, the head waiter touched the customer on the shoulder.

Poubalov looked up with a start, and the head waiter seemed to be apologizing for his intrusion. It was clear that he had supposed the customer to be asleep, or ill. Poubalov paid his check and left the place.

He went to his lodging-house, and when Paul saw that he had lit the gas, he, too, went inside.

He locked the door immediately and applied his eye to the nail hole.

Poubalov sat with folded arms in an old-fashioned rocking chair, gazing abstractedly before him. On the little center table under the chandelier, Paul could just distinguish Clara's photograph.

Paul remained with his eye at the hole until it seemed as if he could stand no longer. In all that time Poubalov had not moved perceptibly.

The watcher got down and looked at his time-piece. It

was half-past ten. He then sat with his head against the door that he might hear the slightest sound from the front room.

Just what possessed Paul to be so vigilant on this occasion, when the spy was doing absolutely nothing but cudgel his inscrutable mind, he could not have told in less vague terms than that he didn't want Poubalov to get away from him. If he were to take a nocturnal, or early morning ramble, Paul purposed to be on hand to accompany him.

Something like a half hour passed, and then Paul heard a long, heavy sigh, and the creak of the rocker as Poubalov rose. Quickly mounting his perch, Paul saw him pace back and forth, his hands clinched behind him and his brow set in hard wrinkles. He seemed to be in for a night of it, and as his movement promised to be productive of nothing more than his quiescence, Paul again dismounted and sat down. So monotonously did the march continue that the listener's head began to droop, lulled by the very sound he had set himself to hear, and had it not been for the extreme anxiety with which he had undertaken his task, Paul would have fallen asleep. After twice catching himself nodding, he no longer dared to sit still. So he rose and stepped lightly about the room to start the blood in his drowsy limbs.

The sound of marching ceased. Poubalov had stopped under the chandelier, and when Paul had him in view he was in the act of turning Clara's photograph face down upon the table. He took out the leather pocketbook that had checked the dagger thrust by Litizki's hand, and examined one of the documents in it attentively. It appeared to be of an official character, for there was a big seal upon it, and it was bound with ribbon. Paul could see the holes made by the dagger in passing through the several folds of the paper, or parchment.

Poubalov laid the document upon the table, sat down, and, drawing fresh paper before him, began to write. His pen traversed the sheets with great rapidity, and as

Paul could hear the scratching plainly, he again sought relief from his uncomfortable perch.

It was nearly one o'clock when the sound of writing ceased.

Paul saw that Poubalov had removed his coat. What he had written was folded and placed in an envelope upon the table.

The watcher supposed that the spy was about to retire, but there was so evidently something further upon Poubalov's mind, something that he seemed to debate whether it were best done now, or in the morning, that Paul kept his place and watched; and as he strained his eye to take in every movement, instinctively shading his face although he stood in the darkness, he saw Poubalov draw a revolver from his hip-pocket.

Placing the hammer at half-cock, he tilted the barrel forward and pushed the cartridge cylinder about with his thumb and finger.

Every chamber seemed to be as he wished it, and he readjusted the barrel.

Then he walked to the bureau upon which swung a half-length mirror. His back was thus partially turned to the watcher, and Paul could see dimly the reflection of his face looking somberly toward him. He held the revolver in his right hand, the finger on the trigger, the barrel pointed toward the floor.

Paul was in an agony of doubt and apprehension. What should he do?

How long would Poubalov stand there and allow him to reflect?

Would the spy, then, "get away," and by this manner of exit?

With his left hand Poubalov took his watch from his pocket. He glanced at the face of the busy and faithful little machine, and it was only too evident that he had set the limit of his life at some point that the moving hands would presently reach.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NEW CLEW.

Frantic with anxiety and dread, Paul followed a sudden impulse and jumped to the floor, ran to the door that opened into the hall, unlocked and opened it and rushed out.

He had a wild idea of bursting in the door of Poubalov's room and wrestling with him if need be to take away the revolver and prevent suicide.

He stopped, startled, just outside his door, for Poubalov stood before him, the light from the chandelier streaming out upon him and showing him erect, alert, his revolver pointed directly at the watcher.

"What is the matter?" asked Poubalov, coolly.

Paul caught his breath and leaned upon the banister.

"I was going out in a hurry and stumbled against a chair," he stammered.

"Strange time of night to do things in a hurry," remarked Poubalov, still aiming his weapon at the young man; "do you belong here?"

"Yes; I moved in yesterday."

Poubalov stood a little aside to let the light fall more fully upon Paul's face.

"Humph!" he said, lowering the revolver; then added, in Russian, "you are Paul Palovna, intimate friend of Ivan Strobel."

"Yes," admitted Paul, in the same language, "I am, and you are his deadly enemy."

"Bah!" exclaimed Poubalov in profound disgust, "you ought to know better. Come in here—but no! you are in a hurry. Go, then; I will talk to you another time."

"Better now, Poubalov," returned Paul, significantly;

"one of us might be missing before another opportunity occurred. I am not so much in a hurry that I cannot listen to you."

"No!" said the spy, decidedly, "go your way, and take this comfort with you, Palovna, that you have done your friend Strobel a service."

He shrugged his shoulders and withdrew into his room and closed the door.

Paul went slowly down the stairs and opened the front door just as the landlady poked her head from her room on the ground floor and inquired in an agitated whisper, "Whatever was the trouble?"

"It is nothing," said Paul, "I stumbled, and the gentleman in the front room mistook me for a burglar, I guess. Sorry I disturbed you."

"It's all right," whispered the landlady, "but I guess he must have scared you some. Your face is as wet as if you'd been out in a rain."

Paul realized then to what a tense degree his nerves had been strained.

Perspiration seemed to be oozing from every pore. His knees felt weak and his head dizzy, but he kept in mind the part he was playing and left the house. However certain it was that Poubalov would infer that Strobel's intimate friend lodged there for the purpose of watching him, it would never do to openly admit the fact by returning immediately to his room.

He went to the corner of Bowdoin Street, and back on the other side to a point directly opposite Poubalov's windows.

As he walked, one deep-toned stroke rang out from a neighboring church tower.

If that was the hour Poubalov had set for putting a bullet into his heart, he had let it pass without taking action.

Paul kept his eyes upon the curtained windows behind which the chandelier light still glowed, and longed to be back at his peephole, watching the spy. Yet there was

nothing that he could do if he were there. He had seen the one great incident in Poubalov's career come to its climax upon the awful verge of tragedy; and he felt that as the spy's life trembled in the balance, the weight had been thrown into the scale for prolonging it by his impulsive jump from the chair on which he had been viewing the scene.

Not that Poubalov was hesitating; his was the nerve to pull the trigger with the precision and steadiness of a marksman when the appointed time came; but the shock of irrelevant circumstances had been just what was needed to release the morbid pressure of gloomy contemplation from the brain, and restore it to its normal activity.

Thus Paul reflected, with his eyes upon the lighted windows. A party of roysterers swung into the place, singing discordantly. One of them fell at the corner of Bowdoin Street, and his companions helped him up with drunken jeers and laughter. Paul had turned his head to watch them, and when he looked again at the lodging-house across the way, all the windows were dark. Poubalov had gone to bed.

As faithful as the unfortunate Litizki to his task, Paul sat up all that night. When drowsiness overcame him, he bathed his face and head with water, or walked gently about the room. He smoked all the cigarettes in his possession, for the sake of having something to do, and when his stock was exhausted, he went to a neighboring "all-night" restaurant and bought a handful of cigars. He listened through the hours for any suggestive sound from the front room, but, beyond an occasional deep breath, he heard nothing.

Poubalov slept well.

It was not until the day, reckoning by the light, was well advanced, that the spy rose and dressed. While he was still busy with his toilet, a messenger called and left a note for Paul with word to the scrub-woman who was already at work, that it was to be delivered at once. It was from Clara.

"A new clew," she wrote, "and the most promising one thus far, has been brought to me this evening. I need help in following it to the end. Owing to my uncle's indisposition, I do not feel like even telling him about it, much less asking him to give me his time. Can you come? I know you are doing much, and quite likely taking time that you ought to devote to work, but I ask some further assistance, nevertheless, knowing that it is not necessary for me to plead. This is so important that I believe you can leave Poubalov for a while, no matter what he is doing. Please come by nine o'clock if you possibly can."

Paul had great faith in Clara, although he had not known with sufficient detail of her recent work to give her judgment all the credit that it deserved, and so he found himself in an annoying quandary. To him it seemed essential to follow Poubalov now that he was well in view.

He felt, too, some disappointment at being called away without being able to feel that his night had been spent sleeplessly to some purpose.

It could not be that Clara had discovered anything of great importance compared to the developments that would probably follow a patient tracking of Poubalov's footsteps during the day.

Why hadn't she mentioned what her clew was? No, she depended upon him to obey her implicitly, as if he had no more discretion than Litizki.

If Paul was a bit unreasonable and restive, let it be charged against his fatigue. Few men can keep an even temper when the nerves are unstrung and the whole body cries for rest. Poubalov saved him from the error, if so it was, of disregarding Clara's wishes. It came about in this way:

Paul climbed to his observation perch, to see how matters stood in the next room. Poubalov had opened the envelope containing the papers he had been at work upon during the midnight hour, and was now destroying them,

burning them one sheet at a time over the wash-bowl that he had set upon the center table.

He was fully dressed, even to the hat on his head, and Paul carefully replaced the nail which protected his peephole.

He stood by the chair with Clara's letter in his hand, still undecided what course to take, when there was a knock at his door.

He opened, and Poubalov stood there.

"You can spare the time now, I suppose?" he said inquiringly with a grim glance at the valentine hanging from the improvised hook.

Paul saw that his ruse was discovered, but he followed the spy into the front room, his heart beating high with expectation.

"There is never an effect without a cause, young man," remarked Poubalov, motioning Paul to a chair; "the effect was sufficient for me last night, and so far as your act deserves it, you have my thanks. This morning I sought the cause, and of course, I found it. Do not be disturbed. I have no reproaches to make. You imagined yourself at war with me, and you took your own methods to win. There is nothing to complain of in that; but you, as a Russian of intelligence, should have known that I could not be as hostile as you think to an American citizen. Bah! it's not worth discussing! You've all lost your heads.

"What I have to say is this: I am on duty for the czar, and having recovered from my dangerous temptation to be derelict, I shall do what duty demands, without let or hindrance from anybody. I will tolerate no interference, no matter whose fair lips give the command. When that little wretch, Litizki, was in that chair where you are now sitting, I sought to influence him by threats against himself. I don't take that method with you, Paul Palovna. If you choose to do so, you can dog my footsteps from now on, for I presume your American laws will not protect me in my desire to work undisturbed; but bear in mind that I have no more love for Ivan Strobel now than I ever

had, and if I see fit to release him, it must be I, Alexander Poubalov, who chooses to do so of his own free will. Do you understand me?"

"Sufficiently to see that you would frighten me from my course by threats against the man whom you have in your power, and whom I am trying to rescue."

"You do well," continued Poubalov; "and if you are in any doubt as to whether I am in earnest, I advise you to report what I have said, and what you saw in this room last night, to Miss Hilman. She will tell you whether I am likely to be gratuitously merciful. Spy upon me, therefore, if you like. I shall know that you defy me, and you will have to bear the consequences. Shall we breakfast together, Paul Palovna?"

Paul ignored the ironical invitation, which was Poubalov's way of saying that he has said his say, and remarked:

"I also have a suggestion to make."

Poubalov raised his brows in contemptuous surprise that anything could be added to his statement of the situation.

"You have spoken of American law," said Paul, "and I simply suggest that the friends of Strobel may to-day resort to law to obtain his freedom. I don't know how much you may have said to Litizki and Miss Hilman, but you have made some damaging admissions to me."

"Really! is that all you can think of? It's hardly worth a reply, but I will suggest in return that what you call my admissions are your own inferences, nothing more. Ask the nearest police captain, or, better, go to the public prosecutor with your imaginings. I will tell you that there isn't a scrap of evidence on which to base my arrest, for that, of course, is what you aim at. You are more of a child than I thought you were, with all your petty contrivances for peeping upon a Russian official. Au revoir, Palovna."

Paul went downstairs in a rage, impressed, as all were whoever came in contact with this remarkable man, with Poubalov's faculty for gaining and keeping a masterful

control over the situation. The worst of it was, the spy was probably entirely in the right so far as law was concerned.

As well arrest himself, Palovna, as this foreigner who had shown his interest in the Strobel case in eccentric ways, perhaps, but who could not be charged with criminality, unless possibly by Litizki, and the tailor had himself made it impossible that he should be of any further service.

There seemed to be no course open to him but to respect Clara's wishes, and, accordingly, out to Roxbury he went.

He arrived at Mr. Pembroke's house just before nine o'clock, and found Clara waiting for him, dressed to go out.

They exchanged information while waiting for Mike to come, Clara telling about the discovery of Patterson, and Paul giving a guarded account of Poubalov's contemplated suicide.

He tried to spare Clara the horrors of the scene, but he felt that she ought to know how deeply in earnest Poubalov was, that she might the more correctly judge him and estimate the value of his threats.

"It must have been a dreadful moment," she said when he had finished, "and I am glad that another tragedy has been averted. It is hard to believe that he will go to extreme measures—but what am I saying? What has he not done that is cruel, barbarous and wicked? How can I expect anything but unmixed evil from such a man? I believe it is well that for a time we can appear to withdraw our observations of him."

Mike was late, but when he did come he came with a coupé.

"Me boss said, miss," he explained, "that if there was to be any travelin,' you was to ride as far an' as long as you liked, with his compliments."

"Your employer is very kind," said Clara. "This gentleman, Mr. Palovna, will go with me, and if he asks you

to do anything, you needn't wait for my consent. We will go straight to the place where you left Patterson. Stop there, and point out the house you think he went into, but don't drive up to it."

When they were in the coupé, Clara continued to Paul:

"I have no definite plan as to Patterson. That must develop when we find him. If he can be cajoled, bribed or frightened into telling us the truth, it must be done. I don't see that we are called upon to make nice discriminations in our methods."

"Any way is fair in dealing with a criminal," returned Paul. "Humph!"

"What is it?" asked Clara, observing that he began to take a lively interest in the street through which they were passing.

"It may be only a coincidence," said Paul, "but it just occurred to me that thus far Mike has taken us over exactly the same course that Poubalov pursued when I followed him last evening."

"I presume it's not a coincidence," responded Clara, and she thought of Litizki's passionate words: "If ever anything is discovered, you discover Poubalov's hand in it."

Step by step the coupé followed Poubalov's line of march, and when it drew up at last, it was at the very corner where Paul had seen the spy talking with the stranger.

Mike got down and opened the door, and as he spoke, Clara looked out in the direction in which he pointed.

"This was where Patterson shook me, miss," he said, "an' I seen him go along down the street an' cross over just below there an' go into a house—that one, I think, with the balcony along the front, the one a gentleman is just comin' out of."

Clara drew back into the coupé hastily. The gentleman coming from the house in question was Poubalov, and he was walking toward them.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STUBBORN ANTAGONIST.

"Stay just where you are, Michael," exclaimed Clara, "and don't let that man see your face."

Mike did as directed, pushing his head and shoulders far into the coupé and whispering:

"It isn't him, is it, miss, who's got anything to do with the case?"

"Yes," she replied in a low tone, while she and Paul kept as far back in the gloom of the carriage as they could; "have you ever seen him before?"

"Yes'm, he was down to the stables the day this gentleman called, askin' would I know the man who did the trick to me wheel."

"It was a ruse," muttered Paul; "he pretended to investigate in the same spirit that I did so as to throw suspicion from himself. If he has anything like the perceptions that we think he has, he will recognize this rig. Isn't it the same, Mike, with which you started to take Mr. Strobel to his wedding?"

"Identical, sir, horse an' all."

Poubalov had passed them during this brief conversation, and as none of them had ventured to look at him, they could not tell whether or not he recognized the turnout.

They could hear his rapid steps as he strode along, and there was certainly no pause to indicate that he had seen anything that surprised or interested him.

"I must know where he goes," said Clara. "Get on the box, Michael, and drive after him without letting him see, if you can help it, that you are following him. Let us know if he enters any house, but do not stop in front of it."

"Yes'm," replied Mike, closing the door.

He turned the vehicle about and drove slowly to the corner.

Poubalov had paused, ostensibly to buy a paper at a news-stand a little way up the street. He glanced back at the approaching vehicle, shrugged his shoulders, and moved on as rapidly as before. Mike reported this to Clara a few minutes later, when he had seen Poubalov board a Scollay Square car.

"He is satisfied that we are following him, then," said Clara, and she felt afraid as she recalled the threats that the spy had uttered to Paul.

Would he proceed promptly to put into execution whatever design he might have for injuring Ivan? Would not the disappointed passion that had led him to all but the commission of suicide now prompt him to murder his prisoner?

Clara sank back and covered her face with her hands, completely unnerved for the moment by the seeming imminence of catastrophe.

"When will the end come!" she moaned.

Mike looked on in honest and surprised distress, and Paul himself, knowing as he did the reasons for her excess of fear, was at his wits' end to suggest comfort.

Clara uncovered her eyes suddenly. They blazed with new determination.

"Michael," she cried, "could you overtake the car he is on?"

"I could try it, miss, but he's got a pretty good start."

"Try it, then. Don't spare the horse for just this once. If you come near to catching up, and he looks around, then drive more slowly, as if you were not able to keep up the pace, and finally stop altogether, let the car get away, and I'll tell you what to do next. Hurry!"

Mike did hurry.

The *compé* started with a jolt as he lashed his astonished horse into a gallop.

"What's your plan, Miss Hilman?" asked Paul, who was at a loss to account for this projected maneuver.

"The man wants us to follow him," she replied, turning upon her companion almost fiercely in the intensity of her excitement. "He would lead us away from the scene of his operations, don't you see? Since he has discovered that you have been watching him, he has thought it all over, and he has concluded that it is more than likely that you tracked him to that street, for that was the street, wasn't it? Of course! Then he would naturally expect me to go there. I don't dream that he foresaw meeting us just now, but what I do believe to be the case is, that finding that house insecure for his purpose, he is now planning to remove his prisoner, and happening upon us as he did, he will do what he can to lead us away from it. Don't you see?"

"It sounds reasonable; and you plan, then, to make a pretense at a desperate effort to catch up with him, and when he has got away a considerable distance, to return to the house and investigate."

"That's it," and Clara again sank back, but this time her face expressed energy and confidence in success.

"I wonder how we are getting on," she said after a moment. They were dashing along Washington Street now at a furious rate, attracting attention from all passers. Paul tried to look ahead, but he could not do so without leaning far out of the coupé, and that did not seem to be advisable.

"Never mind," said Clara; "I think the driver can be trusted to play his part, if his horse doesn't play it for him by falling down from exhaustion. By the way, I had a letter from O'Brien this morning. You don't know who he is, do you? He is the employee at the Park Square Station who saw Billings drive up, and who says that a man left the carriage and went into the station. The detectives, you know, supposed that man to be Ivan. It's a small point, but O'Brien very kindly wrote to me when he discovered it. He says he was talking about the case with a

fellow-workman who remembered the occurrence, and who says that shortly after Billings was seen by O'Brien, a closed carriage stopped at the Columbus Avenue entrance to the station, near the baggage rooms, you know, and that a man left the station and got in. Of course that was the carriage Billings drove, and the man was doubtless the same who got out at the front entrance. He had simply walked through the station, mingled with the crowd, perhaps going so far as to buy a ticket for New York, and then had rejoined his driver. Doesn't it seem clear?"

"It's a perfectly plausible explanation of the point, but it's a pity O'Brien's friend didn't turn up with it sooner. You might have been saved your journey to New York."

"I'm not sure about that. I am not sorry that I saw Lizzie White, although I never felt for an instant that Ivan had eloped."

The coupé was still rattling onward at the highest speed the horse could attain, but a moment after Clara had finished, it came to a sudden halt, and they heard a stern voice saying:

"You know better than to drive so fast in the street! I've a great mind to take you in."

Mike was protesting in characteristic fashion, inventing something about the necessity of catching a train, when Clara opened the coupé door and stepped out. A policeman stood at the horse's head, glaring with offended dignity at the driver.

"If there is any fault it is mine, officer," she said sweetly; "please scold me, for I told him to drive as fast as he could."

"That don't make no difference, ma'am," returned the policeman, instantly mollified, but still feeling it incumbent upon him to assert the majesty of municipal ordinances; "he's a regular, and he knew better. 'Tain't allowed to go so fast anywhere in Boston 'less it's on a race track."

"I'm very sorry," said Clara.

"Go on with you," commanded the policeman to Mike,

"and be a little more careful. It would be rough on me, you see," he added to Clara, "if I wasn't to stop him."

Mike looked inquiringly down at his passenger.

"Come to the door a minute, Michael," she said, and returned to the coupé.

"That cop's too fresh to live," remarked Mike as he put his head in to receive instructions.

"Were we anywhere near the car?" asked Clara.

"Yes'm, we was most onto it, an' I was just goin' to pull up a bit when the cop got in his work."

"Could you see the man we were after?"

"Yes'm; he turned round, an' I guess he saw what the cop did, but I lost sight of him tryin' to keep me horse from treadin' on the cop's toes."

"It's just as well, then," said Clara, satisfied. "I'm rather glad the policeman stopped us, for now Poubalov will be certain why it was that we didn't catch up. You needn't hurry so now, Michael; drive back to the place where we started from."

"Where Patterson shook me, miss? All right. I'm on," and he clambered back to the box.

Nothing occurred to disturb their return journey, and when Mike again opened the door for instructions, Clara and Paul got out.

"We will go straight to the house and inquire for Patterson," said Clara, "and if we don't find him there, we'll ask all along the stret."

"Whist, miss!" exclaimed Mike, in his eagerness gripping her arm; "there goes Patterson now!"

"Where?" she cried, looking, of course, in the wrong direction.

"Below there, him on the box of the closed carriage, miss. On my soul, it looks like the same——"

"Follow it quick, Michael," she said excitedly. "Come, Paul!" and she sprang into the coupé.

"I'll sit on the box with Mike," answered Paul, tremendously aroused; he was already climbing to a place beside

the driver; "from here I can act quicker. Hit her up, Mike!"

So off they went on another pursuit, Mike treating his horse to more lash than he had ever experienced before.

"I don't believe you'll need to go so fast as to risk arrest," said Paul; "Patterson probably don't suspect that we are after him, and it would be better to go a little slower than to be stopped again by a policeman."

"I almost ran down one cop who tried to make me pull up before," responded Mike, through set teeth, "an' I wouldn't mind bein' took in myself if it wasn't for spoilin' the game. I'll look sharp, sir, never fear."

Patterson and his carriage had disappeared around a corner almost before the coupé had started, but they were soon in view again, jogging forward at a rather lively rate several blocks ahead.

"Will I overhaul him, sir, right away?" asked Mike. "I could do it by driving like sin."

"Don't risk it," answered Paul; "as long as he is in sight, I shan't worry if we gain a little at every block. Let's not drive fast enough to attract attention, for we may have a row when we catch him, and the less crowd around the better."

"If there's to be a fight" said Mike, with a hopeful grin, "I can do Patterson. I'm not even with him yet for doin' the trick to me wheel."

"All right. If it comes to a scrimmage, you look after him, and I'll try to attend to the passengers. I'll tell you just what we suspect, so that you can understand what you are to do. If we're not mistaken, Mr. Strobel is in that carriage, helplessly bound. There may be another man with him. In any case, we must get Strobel away and put him in the coupé. When that is done, you drive straight to Mr. Pembroke's. Don't wait for Miss Hilman or me if we don't happen to get in. We'll take care of ourselves. You look out for Mr. Strobel. Call the police to help if you need to, for we've nothing to fear from the law."

"I'm on," said Mike.

The chase went on to the perfect satisfaction of Palovna, who, with growing excitement, saw the distance between him and Patterson's carriage gradually decreasing. His one fear now was that Strobel would be found to be seriously injured, and he felt a great dread lest Poubalov in his madness had killed him! He would not dwell upon this thought, however, concentrating all his force on the struggle that would probably ensue when the closed carriage was at last overtaken.

They were now in Washington Street, and again going toward the city.

Patterson was less than a block away.

"Give it to him now, Mike," said Paul; "get right alongside and make him pull up."

Mike nodded and gave his horse a smart cut with the whip. He sprang forward at a gallop. Patterson was driving near the curb, and Mike took the outside. He drove close beside the closed carriage, in order to "pocket" his adversary and so compel him to pull up. The maneuver succeeded admirably.

Taken by surprise at the sudden appearance of a rapidly galloping horse very near his wheels, Patterson reined his pair nearer to the curb, uttering an impatient curse at the carelessness of the other driver. Mike forced him over still further, and Patterson was compelled in self-defense to stop.

As he did so he turned his head to tell Mike what he thought of him, and Paul recognized the stranger whom he had seen in conversation with Poubalov.

The two drivers exchanged angry words that would look rather worse in print, if possible, than they sounded, and Paul lost no time in descending to the ground. The vehicle, were too close together to admit of going between them, so he ran around to the sidewalk and wrenched open the carriage door.

Then he stood stock still.

The carriage was empty.

Clara was beside him in an instant, and though her face fell, she exclaimed:

"Shut the door and stop the quarrel. I must speak to Patterson."

Everything had happened so quickly that the two drivers were still on their respective boxes, making remarks to each other, when Paul stepped upon the wheel beside Patterson and said:

"Mike, drive up to the curb just in front of us. Get down, Patterson. We've something to say to you."

Patterson looked down in surprise, glanced at Clara, shook his head and gathered up the reins for a fresh start.

Paul sprang from the wheel and caught the horses by the bits before they had taken a step.

Mike was carrying out instructions and was then just abreast of him.

"Mike!" said Paul in a loud voice, "don't stop, but pick up the first policeman you can find and bring him here in a hurry! We'll talk to this man in a cell if he won't wait here."

Patterson was unquestionably alarmed at this.

"What is it you want?" he asked in a surly tone.

"Get down, and the lady there will tell you," answered Paul.

Patterson prepared to obey, but just then a south-bound car stopped near them, and Poubalov alighted. He came rapidly toward the group, his dark face darker yet with passion.

"Stay on the box!" he commanded. He took off his hat, bowed stiffly to Clara, with one hand on the carriage door, and said:

"This is my carriage, Miss Hilman. Drive on, James," and before even quick-witted Clara could interpose a restraining word, the door had closed upon Poubalov, and the carriage rolled away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HIDE AND SEEK.

Clara's face was deathly pale, and in her heart anger burned as hotly at Poubalov's ceremonious insolence as it ached with this fresh blow to her hopes. Paul, blue with despair, feared for her, but she had not yet met the emergency that was too great for her to contend with, however unsuccessful she might be.

"We must waste no time here!" she cried stepping quickly forward to the coupé. "Return to that house, Paul, and search it; do what you think is best, according to developments. I am going to pursue Poubalov as I said I would. If I do not hear from you before the day is over, Paul, I shall go to that house myself. If you have to go downtown, leave word at Mrs. White's. Keep that carriage in view, Michael, but don't try to overtake it. Good-by, Paul!"

Her voice quivered with the desperation that had driven the tears to the brink of her eyes, and she hastily entered the coupé and pulled down the window curtains. Thus shut out from view, she gave way freely to her overstrained emotions, her soul seeming to be borne along on a rushing torrent of grief, and she felt that appalling desire, than which there is no more shocking experience of the heart, to throw herself into the arms of the lost loved one and find comfort there.

It was a great day for sturdy Mike. The regret that he hadn't had time just now to "lambast" his friend Patterson, was sweetly assuaged by the fact that he was still pursuing the loafer who did the trick to his wheel, and the hope that another opportunity would soon offer for a fine fight.

The chase exhilarated him, and the thought that he

was called upon to champion a beautiful woman, made his fists ache to do valiant service upon somebody's head, Patterson's preferred, and he thumped his knees gently with his knuckles by way of practice, and kept his horse at a brisk trot a few rods behind Poubalov's carriage.

He was quite confident that he could "do" both driver and passenger if such a thing were necessary, and he longed heartily for an occasion to demand a trial of his prowess.

After having traversed a considerable distance, he pulled up, got down and gently opened the door.

"Whist, miss," he said, "they've stopped entirely."

"Where are we, and where are they?" asked Clara, now her composed self again.

"In Scollay Square," answered Mike, "and they're just foreninst the Crawford House. The gentleman's talkin' to Patterson. Now he's lookin' at me, bad luck to him!"

"I don't wish to come up to him," said Clara; "if he comes this way I shall be glad. You must have no fear if we talk angrily together."

"I'd like to——" began Mike, significantly.

"Yes, I know you would," she interrupted, "but we must have no trouble unless I give the word. I might do so if I thought a policeman would arrest him, and not you."

"As to that, miss," said Mike, ruefully, "any copper's more likely to pull in the poor cab-driver instead of the fine gentleman. My brother's on the force, an' if we was only on his beat, now!"

"Tell me what they are doing, please."

"The gentleman is going into the hotel. Patterson is starting away. Shall I follow him?"

Clara reflected just an instant.

"No," she answered. "Stay here. I'm not going to pursue another empty carriage."

"Huh!" chuckled Mike, "you're a keen one, sure, for that's just what he's wantin' you to do. Patterson has turned down Hanover Street."

"We'll wait until he comes back," said Clara, "if we have to spend the rest of the day here; but you watch the hotel— Stay! there's a side entrance to the Crawford House, isn't there? Can you place the coupé where you can see both doors?"

"Yes, but I don't know how long the police will let me stay there."

"Try it, please. If they make you move on, drive around the square and come back."

Mike accordingly drove up to the curb of Tremont Row, where he could look down Brattle Street. No policeman had disturbed him before Patterson turned from Cornhill into the square. He had driven around a few blocks, evidently for the purpose of testing the design of his pursuers. Clara wondered why Poubalov should permit such a chase to continue. It would have seemed more like him to come to her with some of his characteristic sophistry, and either appear to yield, or adopt an entirely different course. It must be that he had some plan in view to the execution of which Patterson and his closed carriage were essential.

Patterson drove to the front entrance of the hotel and waited, casting ugly glances across the square at Mike, who grinned complacently and shook his fist.

After a moment Poubalov came out, entered the carriage, and Patterson promptly drove away. It was plain as day that he had received his instructions while Poubalov stood on the side-walk at the time of their arrival there. He was to see whether Clara would persist in her pursuit, and if so he was to—and that remained to be seen.

Mike speedily resumed the reins, and again the chase was in progress. Patterson went down Hanover Street, and, without any apparent effort to distance his pursuer, kept on until he came to Fleet Street, which leads to one of the East Boston ferries.

He turned in there, and Mike lost a little by reason of a temporary jam of vehicles. As soon as he was out of it, he too went through Fleet Street, and saw, to his satisfac-

tion, that Patterson was still but a short distance ahead.

With painful anxiety, however, he saw that Patterson was making for the ferry, before which a rapidly increasing line of vehicles stood waiting for a chance to cross. Mike whipped up energetically, and managed to beat several drays and express wagons on the way in, and when at last he had to pull up and take his place in line, Patterson's was the carriage directly in front of him.

"Smart, ain't ye, ye loafer!" said Mike, disdainfully.

Patterson did not notice this remark, or any other of the many with which Mike assailed him while they waited for an incoming boat to discharge its cargo. When at length the gates were opened for the waiting vehicles, Mike was on the alert to take advantage of any opening that might occur to enable him to forge ahead, but none occurred.

Policemen and ferry officials kept the teams to their places, and if Mike had attempted a trick, he would have been compelled to go back, and thus lose more than he could have gained.

One by one the carriages and wagons went on board, and just after Patterson had passed the barrier the gates were closed.

"Hold on there!" howled Mike, beside himself with disappointment and rage, "don't ye see I've got to get aboard?"

The gateman laughed and told him to make himself easy; and Patterson, from his place at the very stern of the ferryboat, stood up in his seat and beckoned to Mike ironically.

The unhappy chap fumed in vain and got down to tell Clara about it.

"We're shook, miss, shook entirely," he said despondently.

When Cara understood the unfortunate meaning of his words, and saw that Poubalov had won in another skirmish, she herself was in a quandary.

"There are two ferries, aren't there?" she asked. "Aren't they near enough together on this side to make it possible to watch both for their return? for, of course, they haven't gone to East Boston for any other purpose than to come back here again unperceived."

"That might possibly be done, miss," said Mike, after a look at the jam of vehicles behind him, "but we're in for a trip across anyways, for I couldn't turn 'round now. An' then, d'ye see, there's more ways to get back from East Boston. They might go over to Chelsea, an' come back by that ferry, or take a run around by road and bridge, so you'd best give 'em up as lost, miss, an' it's sorry I am to tell you so."

"Well," said Clara sighing, "if we have to cross, we can make inquiries on the other side, and possibly come up with them again. We'll try it."

Inquiries on the East Boston side were vain when they landed there ten minutes later.

No one to whom they spoke could remember whether a carriage such as they described had been across or not.

One man, anxious to parade information that he did not possess, thought vaguely that the carriage might have gone thus and so, and Clara instructed Mike to drive that way a short distance, and then to return to Boston by the other ferry.

This was done, and all trace of Poubalov having been lost, and but one more hope remaining to her—Paul's investigation of the house in Roxbury—she directed Mike to drive to Ashburton Place.

Paul had arrived at Mrs. White's a few minutes ahead of her.

"I waited for you," he said in a disheartened voice, "because I'm completely at a loss what to do next, not because I have anything of importance to say."

"Everything is of importance, Paul," replied Clara, finding herself now called upon to inspire her allies with courage as well as give them ideas. "You went to that quaint-looking house, of course?"

"Yes, it's an abandoned tavern—that is, it was formerly run as a hotel, but the enterprise was a failure, and it is now closed. I learned that much from a man who was passing while I stood under the balcony, waiting for somebody to answer my ring. He remarked that he didn't believe I'd find anybody at home, as the house had been practically deserted for some time."

"But we saw Poubalov come out of there this morning," urged Clara.

"I said as much to my informant, but he answered that it was probably somebody who had been looking it over with a view to purchase. Of course we know better, but it goes to show that neither Patterson nor anybody else lives there."

"Except Ivan, if he still lives," said Clara gravely.

"Don't think I forgot that possibility," returned Paul, earnestly. "I quietly tried the door after my informant had passed on; he didn't know the name of the owner, by the way. Of course the door was locked. I went around to the side and back, for there is a driveway there leading to stables that are apparently as little used as the tavern itself. Every door and every window was closed. I knocked and shouted, and then neighbors put their heads out of windows and advised me that I was making a noise to no purpose. If it had been night I would have burst open a door or window, and have gone through the house from roof to cellar, but that plan is rather impracticable by daylight."

"I wonder," said Clara, "if the law would allow a search of that building. I mean something to be done officially. I've heard of search-warrants."

"It's barely possible, and you might try it; but my idea, such as it is, would be to go there quietly to-night ourselves, and force an entrance."

"And in either case Poubalov might return during the day, and effect a change in the situation that would make the search useless."

"Yes," said Paul, gloomily, "I had thought of that."

"The house must be watched this afternoon," said Clara, decidedly, "but it is my very distinct impression that Poubalov will go to his lodging before he returns to Roxbury. It seems to me he must have been on his way there when he was compelled to make a long detour to elude us. And that means that I think his lodging should be watched as carefully as the abandoned tavern. Will you pass the afternoon in your room, Paul?"

"Certainly, unless there is a better way of watching there. You must remember that Poubalov has discovered my peephole."

"Then," said Clara, "we will borrow the little front hall room occupied by the young lady. Let us go down at once."

On this occasion Mrs. White had left them to themselves, much to Clara's relief, for she would not have cared again to discuss her plans in the good lady's presence. It was not that she distrusted Mrs. White's intentions, but she had proven before that she was exceedingly pliable in Poubalov's hands.

As they were ready to go, Clara sought Mrs. White to say good-by.

"I'm sorry you are going so soon," said the landlady; "I thought you and Mr. Palovna would want a long talk, and so I busied myself in the kitchen, for fear I couldn't help interrupting to tell you my own good news. I expect Lizzie home to-night."

"Do you, indeed?" exclaimed Clara; "I am really very glad for you."

"It seems better, doesn't it?" continued Mrs. White, anxious to talk to somebody, and eager for sympathy; "she hasn't told me a word in her letters about why she went away, but, of course, I suspected; and I think from the way she writes in the letter I got this morning that she feels better, poor thing! At any rate, she's coming, and I feel very happy, and I should be perfectly content if only you could be happy, too, Miss Hilman."

"That seems almost an impossible boon for me now,"

replied Clara, gently; "I shall come to see you and your daughter if she would like to have me."

"I am sure she would, Miss Hilman. Must you hurry?"

Every minute seemed so precious to Clara that she almost begrudged the brief interval spent in this exchange of courtesies. On the way to Bulfinch Place she told Paul again that she should manage to watch the tavern during the afternoon, "but," she added, "you are most likely to meet important developments, and you will know where to find me, either near the tavern, or at my uncle's. I shall try to watch the tavern in such a way as not to frighten off Poubalov should he wish to go in, but once he should enter, I shall follow him, you may be sure."

At the lodging-house Clara made herself known to the occupant of the front hall room, who was at the time home for luncheon.

Clara talked with her apart at length, telling her in a general way of her troubles, but not indicating her plans in detail.

The young woman had not come in contact with Poubalov at all, it seemed.

She hardly knew that he was a lodger in the house, and the upshot of it was that her sympathies were aroused, and Paul was installed in her room, where he could keep watch upon the roadway through the slats of the closed blinds. So once more Clara bade him good-by, and set forth on her own task.

Paul did not venture to keep himself awake by smoking in the young lady's room, and he therefore had a dreadfully hard time of it, for the entire afternoon passed without an event of any kind to break the monotony of his watch.

The young lady returned at six o'clock, and looked in for a moment before going to dinner. After that she sat gossiping with the landlady.

The sun set and twilight gathered, and Paul began to

fear that Poubalov had changed his quarters without giving notice; but just before it was too dark to distinguish faces in the street below, a carriage stopped before the door and Paul saw that Patterson sat on the box.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.

"About this hour, one week ago to-day," thought Clara as she took her place again in the coupé, "I should have been getting into a carriage at the church door, with Ivan, as his wife! What an eternity seems to have passed since then! Will the search and the waiting never end?"

There were no tears now, no disposition to give way. The dull ache at her heart was there, and it seemed as if it would stay forever, but all emotion now was held in check by her determination not to let the day pass without a decisive investigation of this latest clew that had so far led to so much racing about, and thus far, too, to the utter defeat of her every plan.

"Where to, miss?" asked Mike who had been standing at the coupé door.

Clara had forgotten him for the moment, forgotten even where she was.

Aroused to the work in hand, she debated for about one second whether to appeal to a lawyer to get a search-warrant for her.

She dismissed the suggestion as likely to involve too much delay. She had never had any experience in law suits, but she had that general conviction due to the accepted phrase "the law's delay," that no one should resort to the courts unless there were ample time and to spare.

"We will go first to my uncle's house," she said, "and I would like to have you take such a route that you will pass the house where we saw Poubalov and Patterson this forenoon."

"An I s'pose I'm to let you know if I see what's-his-name or Patterson on the way?"

"By all means! do not stop unless you do."

The half hour's drive to Roxbury was without adventure. Clara now had the curtains of the coupé up, and she glanced from side to side through the windows as they rolled along, ever alert to catch any sign of her adversaries.

The old tavern looked, indeed, deserted.

It needed but a touch of moss or ivy, to suggest a ruin, for it was not only an ancient building, but sadly out of repair as well.

After they had passed beyond it a little way, Clara signaled to Mike to stop.

"I dare not leave this place unguarded a moment," she said; "there is no telling when Poubalov will return, but I must go home for a very short time, or there will be anxiety and perhaps search for me. Suppose you stay here till I come back. It won't take me long if I go by car. Please, Michael, don't do anything rash. There was another good fellow, not so sensible as you, poor man! who tried to help me, and he got himself into dreadful trouble over it. This man, Poubalov, is a terrible enemy, Michael."

"Is he the sort that carries a gun in one pocket and a razor in another?" asked Mike with perfect seriousness.

"He goes well armed," replied Clara, earnestly, "and he has neither conscience nor fear. You know what I want to accomplish, Michael, but if any life is risked to save another's, it must be mine. I shall be very much displeased if anything serious happens while I am gone. Wait for me, sure."

"All right, miss," said Mike, resignedly; "if anything happens after you get back, though, you bet I'll take a hand in!"

And if there had been any temptation for a scrimmage during Clara's absence, there is no manner of doubt that

Mike would have taken part in it. in spite of her injunctions.

Clara found Louise in a very nervous condition.

"I have not been so much worried about you, dear," she said, "for I have learned to feel confidence that you can take care of yourself. Still I am relieved to see you safe again. My chief anxiety is about papa. I am afraid there is something very troublesome in his business, and that he is breaking down under the strain."

"I know that his business has been troubling him very much of late," responded Clara, "for he told me so, and any one could see that he is much disturbed; but how has he shown it to-day? I didn't see him at breakfast, you know."

"No, he hurried to his office, as he told me later, to get some important mail. I didn't notice anything beyond his usual nervous manner—that is, his recent manner, at breakfast time, but about half an hour after you had gone he returned in great haste and inquired for you. I told him you had gone with Paul and another man who had given you a clew, and that I couldn't tell when you would return. He seemed very much disappointed, and walked up and down the room several times. I asked him if he had any news about Ivan. He answered abruptly: 'I think so. I must see Clara.'"

Startled by hope and fear at once, Clara sank into a chair.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Louise in dismay, "don't please break down now, for that isn't all, and I am so afraid you'll need all your strength to-day."

"I am strong," said Clara, resolutely, but it was all she could do to keep her voice steady; "this day will see the end one way or another, and I am prepared for it."

"I begged papa to tell me what he had heard, but he refused to do so, almost roughly, too. 'Tell her to wait when she comes in,' he said, and he went out again. He came back at luncheon time looking dreadfully excited. His first words were an inquiry for you. The perspiration

rolled down his face as he tried to be calm. He couldn't eat or keep still. I tried to soothe him, but he wouldn't let me. Then I insisted that he tell me what he had heard. 'I haven't heard anything,' he answered excitedly; 'who said I had? I only surmise. I must see Clara.' We both supposed you would come home to luncheon, and he waited for you as long as his impatience would let him. He went away about fifteen minutes ago, telling me again to have you wait for him. I am dreadfully alarmed."

"So am I," said Clara in a low voice. She was beginning to feel a sense of confusion, and she had to think hard to convince herself that she had really left Paul on guard at Bulfinch Place and Michael in the street near the old tavern. It seemed to her essential that she should be in both places, and here at home also. She had intended to seek her uncle's assistance in any event, and now he was vainly looking for her with some manner of important and, it seemed likely, bad news.

"I am faint," she added after a moment; "perhaps I can think better if I have a cup of tea."

Louise hastened to give the orders to the servant, and a few minutes later Clara ate and drank. It was well that she thought of luncheon, well that she could eat, for her vital energies had been severely drawn on, and there was much more ahead of her to do. After she had refreshed herself she said:

"I cannot wait for uncle. I don't know what is the most important thing to do, but I feel that I must not wait here. I will send Michael, the cabman, back. Please see that he has luncheon, and keep him here until uncle returns. Then send him for me. He will know where to find me, and I promise to come home at once unless—Well, send him to me, and I will return if I can."

Louise was tearful at Clara's departure, but she did not try to detain her. It would have done no good, and she knew it.

When Clara found Mike faithfully on guard just where she had left him, she told him her programme, and

together they hunted for a place from which she could keep her eyes on the old tavern, unobserved by Poubalov, should he return.

They found it in the sitting-room of a house across the way, the mistress of which, a plain, practical woman who knew the woes of economy, was not averse to renting for a few hours the apartment she seldom had time to use, and never on a Monday.

This done, Mike drove to Mr. Pembroke's and hitched his horse at the gate, with its nose in a feed-bag. The young man made short work of the luncheon Louise had prepared for him, and then promptly fell asleep over the book she gave him to while away time with.

No good end will be served by reviewing the lonely hours of Clara's vigil. It was with her, as with Paul, a monotonous period, far harder to endure, in some senses, than the exciting and exacting experiences of the forenoon.

It will be enough, then, to say that when Mike came in the edge of the evening to tell her that her uncle was at home, she had seen no sign of Poubalov or Patterson, or of life in the ancient tavern.

Reluctantly she quitted her post, because nothing had happened, willingly because she hoped for definite information of some kind from her uncle. The coupé was at the door.

"Will you want me longer, miss?" asked Mike as she came out, prepared to go home.

"I suppose you ought to go," answered Clara, doubtfully.

"I dunno," said Mike, in the same manner; "me boss will be wonderin' what's become of the rig."

The long day, spent so far as he could see to no purpose, had tried him, and yet, had Clara said the word he would have remained in one spot through the night. Clara did not say it.

She, too, was fatigued, not more with the exertion of the

first half of the day than with the tedious watching of the second.

"You may drive me home," she said wearily; "and if your employer will let you, you might come back in an hour or two to see if I need you."

Mike, therefore, drove away, when he had left Clara at Mr. Pembroke's gate.

She went up to the house, and Louise met her at the door with a white, frightened face.

"Papa is worse than ever," she whispered; "go to him at once. He is in the library."

Clara opened the door and went in.

Her uncle sat at the table, with his arms and head upon it, and he did not look up until she touched him and spoke to him.

"I am sorry, uncle dear," she said, "that I was not at home when you wanted me."

He raised his head with a groan.

"It doesn't matter," he responded; "you could have done nothing, as it has happened."

"Didn't you have some news for me, uncle? Tell me; I can endure anything."

He tried to look at her, but a violent fit of trembling seized him and he averted his eyes.

"I thought there was going to be news, good news," he stammered, "but——" and he shook his head sorrowfully.

"Do you mean that you have been disappointed, uncle?"

"Disappointed!" he repeated excitedly; "worse! All is lost, Clara, lost! Oh! that wily Russian!"

"What Russian, uncle? In mercy's name, tell me!"

"Your man Poubalov! He is——" Mr Pembroke's words stuck in his throat and he looked at Clara with watery eyes.

"You have seen him then," she whispered faintly.

Mr. Pembroke nodded.

"And you have nothing to tell me?"

Her uncle opened his lips, tried to speak, and failing,

grasped the table with both hands while his eyes fixed themselves in a stare and his face grew livid.

Clara ran to the sideboard in the dining-room and brought him a glass of brandy.

She poured a quantity down his throat till he gasped with pain.

The spasm passed, but left him weak, well-nigh helpless, and Clara summoned the servant to take him to his room.

A neighboring physician was called in, and after half an hour or so he reported that Mr. Pembroke was in no immediate danger.

Clara wished to see him, not, however, to torment him with questions, but the physician advised that he be left alone, with merely a servant, or Louise at hand to attend to his needs.

"I am pretty certain," added the doctor, "that your presence would irritate him."

Clara withdrew to the drawing-room and tried to collect her thoughts. She had not heard from Paul and it was now eight o'clock. It could not be that nothing had happened during the long afternoon. Something surely had occurred, and that through Poubalov, to prostrate her uncle—— Ah! she could not sit still. Her programme had not been fully performed. She was useless here, in the way, the doctor had said that plainly enough. The tavern must be searched to-night, and if Paul were not there to help, she must do without him.

She said nothing to Louise, or the servants. In the kitchen she found a candle and a box of matches. There and elsewhere about the house were keys of various descriptions. She took every one she could lay her hands on, and thus provided, set forth alone.

It was a very quiet, retired street, on which the tavern stood. Once it had been a main road, but traffic had long since been diverted into other channels. She saw nobody as she approached the gloomy structure with its overhanging porch, and few lights were in the windows of adjacent

houses. Under the porch she paused a moment in the effort to still the beating of her heart. Then, instead of making any attempt to pass through the front door, she went around to the driveway that Paul had described, and came to an entrance at the very back of the tavern. She placed a trembling hand upon the knob and sought to insert a key in the lock—but the door was opening before her! It was not only not locked, it had not been latched, and the pressure of her hand had set it ajar.

With unsteady step and with her mind bewildered by grewsome conjectures, Clara entered. She closed the door behind her and lit the candle. Had Poubalov, then, returned when she had weakly given up the watching, and abducted Ivan a second time? What did her uncle's words mean? "All is lost!" Was Ivan—— She did not permit herself to frame the thought completely, but gathering all her resolution set forth to accomplish her task. Not even indulging in a useless regret that Paul was not with her, she looked about the room in which she stood. It had once been a kitchen, and a glance at it was enough. An open door was before her and she passed through it.

This was evidently the dining-room, and several doors were in view, only one of which was open. Feeling that this indicated the course taken by Poubalov in carrying Ivan out of the house from the room where he had been confined, she pushed on, and passing through this door, found herself in the front hall. There was a stairway at her right hand, and doors at both right and left. Whither should she go? The doors were closed and she chose the stairs.

At the top were two corridors as well as the passage leading to another flight of stairs. Haphazard she proceeded along the corridor to the left. It was tortuous, like all hotel passages, and the floor was broken here and there by steps, now up, now down. She passed many doors, but all were closed. At the very end were two doors, almost side by side, and as she stood hesitant, her blood chilled and her heart leaped to her throat.

Was that a groan that she had heard behind one of those doors?

Utterly unable to move, she listened with painful intentness. Yes—again it came, muffled, feeble, inarticulate but unmistakably the sound of a human voice. In her agony of apprehension Clara found herself halting, from a strange inability to decide which door to open.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

POUBALOV SUCCEEDS.

Her indecision was but momentary. Every nerve tingling with apprehension, her arms straining to embrace her lover and allay his suffering, she threw open the door at her right hand. Dusty furniture, faded hangings confronted her, nothing else. Aroused by the disappointment to a fever of anxiety and energy, she laid her hand upon the other door, and above the rattling of the knob she heard again the faint moan. The door was locked, and it merely creaked complainingly when she exerted all the pressure she could bring to bear against it.

She must work quickly. Holding the candle parallel to the floor, she allowed several drops of the melted tallow to fall, and on them she fastened her tiny torch upright. Then she applied her keys, one after the other, to the lock. It was a commonplace lock, a boot-buttoner would have worked it, and the most commonplace key in her collection at last turned freely and shot back the bolt. She threw the door open and rushed in, and as she passed, her flying skirts whisked out the candle flame and she was in darkness, but in the flashing glance she had had of the room she had seen the figure of a man bound to a chair, a cloth wound about his head and across his mouth.

Clara did not seek the prisoner in the darkness. All impulse to rush forward and throw her arms about him had vanished; in its place was an icy chill at the heart and an infinite sob that lodged in her throat and would not out. Hastily still but with nerveless limbs she stooped and felt for the candle, and, having found it, she again brought its wick to flickering life and raised it from the floor. Standing then upon the threshold, one hand

clutching the jamb, she made certain that the fleeting vision of surprise and disappointment was bitter and amazing reality. The man bound upon the chair was old Dexter.

He turned upon her his blinking eyes, rendered sightless for the moment by the mild glare of the candle flame. He could stir no other part of his body by so much as a hair's breadth. A long rope was coiled many times about him, binding his legs to the chair rungs, his arms to his side, and his head to the back of the chair. A pitiful groan gurgled again in his throat as Clara held up the candle and looked at him.

She stood thus not longer than a second, and then, having placed the candle in a cup that stood on the mantel, she sought to loose him. That he was concerned in some way with Ivan's disappearance she could not doubt, but she allowed herself no thought or hesitation on that account. His evident suffering appealed to her, and she plied her fingers hard and fast to undo the rope. The knot was at his back and it had not been drawn extremely taut, the numerous coils in themselves being almost sufficient to hold the prisoner in his place. Very shortly, therefore, she had the free ends of the rope in hand, and she unwound them from Dexter's arms, still standing behind his back and working above his head. When with his own hands he began to loose the coils from his lower limbs, she untied the handkerchief that held the gag in his mouth, and Dexter was free.

He arose trembling. His limbs were stiff with long constraint and he steadied himself by grasping the back of the chair and leaning upon it. Breathing heavily and muttering unintelligible curses he turned slowly about and peered into Clara's eyes.

"Ha!" he gasped, "it's you, is it!"

His eyes, till then glowing with the rage of a baffled will, now flamed with ungovernable hate. Clara, all her resolution gone, her very life seeming to depart from her, yet stood ready to do what she could to help him, when

with a passionate shriek he suddenly extended his thin quivering hands and seized her violently by the throat. Taken by surprise, her nervous energy exhausted by the long strain and its attendant disappointments, Clara made but slight resistance. Dexter clutched her with the desperate strength of a maniac and pushed her back against the wall.

What with the noise they made in moving across the floor, and Dexter's snarling curses, she did not hear the sound of rapidly approaching steps along the corridor; but just as the frenzied old man had pressed her against the wall, and when it seemed as if his fingers would lock inextricably upon her throat, Poubalov dashed into the room, laid hold of Dexter, wrenched him away from her, picked him up bodily, bore him screaming across the chamber and threw him heavily upon a bed. Then he placed his hand over the old man's mouth and looked around. Clara was now held hard and fast by another man, and although Poubalov's eyes glittered with a fierce light, he made no effort to interfere. Paul Palovna appeared in the doorway, his weary face glowing with joy as he looked upon his friend restored at last to the arms of her who loved him.

After a moment Strobel raised his head, and Clara, still embracing him, followed his eyes with her own, almost unbelieving that this meeting was reality. She turned her gaze with Ivan's to where Poubalov sat on the bed forcibly quieting the ravings of old Dexter.

"Miss Hilman," said the spy in his deepest tones, "you have been the hardest adversary I ever encountered. Last evening you gave me two alternatives of action. You told me to take you to your lover, or you would pursue me relentlessly. You have made it a desperately hard task for me, but to some extent at least I have succeeded in evading both alternatives, and have, instead, brought your lover to you."

Clara turned her wondering eyes to Ivan's for confirmation and explanation.

"It is true, dearest," he said. "We owe my deliverance to Poubalov, and without his efforts I shudder to think what would have happened to me."

"Is it possible," asked Clara in a subdued voice, "that you have really been trying to find Ivan all along?"

"Miss Hilman," replied Poubalov, "until this Monday morning I did not know where Mr. Strobel was, and I had not the least suspicion of the truth until late last Friday night."

"Let me sit down," said Clara faintly, "I cannot grasp it all. Tell me, Ivan."

Ivan had conducted her to the chair wherein she had found Dexter a prisoner, and at her last words Poubalov turned away his head with a bitter smile. Not even yet would she trust him to speak the truth!

"We owe our separation," said Ivan, "to the villain who lies there under Poubalov's hand and to him alone. To Poubalov we owe the deliverance. This man Dexter, Clara, is a money lender of the most outrageous type. Your uncle, to tide over a business depression, borrowed nearly a hundred thousand dollars from him. This debt was due to Dexter two days after what was to have been our wedding. I am telling you what Poubalov learned after his suspicions were attracted in the right direction. Tell her, my friend! You can do it better than I."

"Miss Hilman will not believe me," replied Poubalov.

"Oh, but I will!" cried Clara starting from the chair impulsively as she realized the situation. She went to the bed where the spy still sat with his hand over Dexter's mouth, and held out her hand. "Won't you forgive me?" she faltered; "I know I have cruelly misjudged you."

Poubalov raised her hand to his lips and was about to answer when Dexter, the pressure removed from his mouth, scrambled to his knees, clinging to the Russian for support, and screamed, "Pay me! pay me! you're not married yet and you've got to pay me! I'll ruin Mat Pembroke! Pay me! I'll——"

The old man choked, pawed with both palsied hands at his collar and would have fallen from the bed if Poubalov had not turned hastily from Clara and caught him. Clara shrank away, not terrified but shocked at Dexter's appearance, while Palovna hurried across the room to lend a hand.

"He is dying!" exclaimed Clara faintly.

"No, Miss Hilman, not dying," responded Poubalov quickly, "but he is a very sick man. Thanks, Paul Palovna, but I can get on better with him alone. You may go ahead of me, if you please, and try to find a physician——"

"I saw a doctor's sign near the street corner," interrupted Palovna.

"Summon him at once, then," said Poubalov who was bearing old Dexter as tenderly as a nurse might carry a sick child; "I will await you at the door and," addressing Clara, "be with you here in a moment if you would hear the hidden history of your troubles."

"Better here, sweetheart," whispered Strobel, "here where I passed my week of death than in any other place!"

It was several minutes before Poubalov returned. He carried Dexter not only to the door but through the street to the physician's house where medical skill was promptly applied with a view to restoring the miser's wreck of a body to something like life. If Dexter's course had run tranquilly he might, perhaps, have lingered like a noxious weed, for a long time upon the earth, but after the complex shocks of disappointment, imprisonment and fear, he had thrown the total of his nervous and physical energies into that mad attack upon Clara. There remained, then, but the dregs of his vicious vitality, and these sustained him less than the length of the night. He was still alive but the end was plainly in sight when Poubalov left him to rejoin the lovers.

"Miss Hilman," he said the moment he came in, "your judgment of me has been marvellously correct. It is true

that you have erred in detail and believed me deceiving you when I was doing my utmost to put the truth before you; but it is impossible for me to be straightforward. Mr. Strobel has said that his deliverance is due to me; that is true, but no credit is due me for generosity or nobility of conduct. What I have done in the way of searching for him and restoring him to liberty, has been done entirely in accordance with my nature. My desire to appear well in your eyes might lead me to vain reflections on what my nature might have been if the circumstances of my life had been other than they were, but past circumstances cannot be changed and nothing can palliate the fact that long practice as a detector of stealthy criminals has made me habitually devious in my methods."

"Mr. Poubalov," Clara began gently, but the Russian would not let her utter the deprecating words that were on her lips.

"I could not change my methods," he said, "and moreover, there were circumstances connected with this matter that made it impossible for me to take you fully into my confidence. Don't you recall how I refused to answer, or evaded your questions? I would not lie to you, and I could not tell you the truth, for I was charged with a message from the czar to Mr. Strobel and to none other could I give it, and not to him unless I were satisfied of certain things, which, until Litizki's attempt upon my life were in doubt."

"You must have suffered keenly," said Clara softly; "tell me all now if you can."

"His imperial majesty, whom God preserve," resumed Poubalov, "saw fit to effect a complete restoration of the estates of the Strobel family, which had been confiscated on account of supposed treason, and to recall all the members of the family from exile. There was but one doubt in his august mind, and that related to your lover, Ivan. If he were engaged in sending pernicious literature to Russia, or in any other way fomenting the discontent that affects some of our people, the decree of restoration could

not issue. I came to America solely to discover what Ivan Strobel was doing and thinking. I could not leave the country until I had found him unless I chose to disregard the wishes of my sovereign. Therefore, when he disappeared, I bent every energy to finding him. It is the habit of men like Litizki to invest me in their imaginations with extraordinary if not superhuman powers, and it is a part of my policy to encourage their delusion. But I am only an ordinary man, Miss Hilman, and in your hands I have proved to be as weak as the weakest."

He paused and looked somberly at the floor.

"I have been sadly puzzled by this case," he continued after a moment without raising his eyes; "nothing ever seemed so impenetrable a mystery. I was sincere in thinking the Nihilists had had something to do with it. After seeing you I was certain that no other woman could have lead Strobel away; but I went to New York for much the same reason that you did, I suppose, hoping for some clew. I had about given up the Nihilistic theory when Litizki's assault and some inquiries I made shortly after, set that at rest completely. When Billings called at your house I determined to track him. Why not tell you then about it? Ask yourself if you would have believed me. You would have said that I was already in league with Billings."

"I did think so," murmured Clara guiltily.

"And I presume you thought I was afraid to face him. Yes? Then you see now that I had to operate alone. I was hiding in the shrubbery when he left your house. It was dark, but you lingered at the gate and so prevented me from leaving my place of concealment until Billings had got so far away that I could not find him. But I had seen his face. I readily saw that Litizki was following me that night and I purposely gave him a chase in order to mask my real purpose.

"When we left the train in the Park Square Station after our return from New York on Friday evening, I recognized Billings among those upon the station platform. I

left you abruptly to follow him. He waited for the next New York train which followed us in directly, for we were late, you remember, and there met the wretch whom you found imprisoned here. I will not enter into the details of my all-night watching and inquiring, but will confine myself to the results. First, to jump over several steps, I found that Dexter was going to pack Billings off to Europe, and I followed to the steamer, hoping for a chance to speak with Billings, for I can usually worm or frighten secrets from guilty men. Dexter stuck closely to him, however, and I returned from a trip to Boston Light having seen both Billings and Litizki in the steerage."

"Litizki!" exclaimed Clara.

"Yes. By tracking Dexter and employing my usual methods, I got acquainted with his man, Patterson. It was he who overcame Mr. Strobel in the closed carriage a week ago to-day, and who left him there bound and stupefied by a drug that he had forced down his throat while he went through the Park Square Station to give color to the theory that Dexter gave to the police that Strobel had gone to New York. Dexter at first declared that he had seen Strobel buy his ticket, but later he weakend on that point, saying he might have been mistaken. He had said enough for Detective Bowker, however, and the police investigation was pursued half heartedly.

"Well, I looked up Dexter's affairs and I found that he had a grip on Mr. Pembroke."

"Don't tell me my uncle was guilty of——"

"No, Miss Hilman," interrupted Poubalov, "Mr. Pembroke had nothing to do with the abduction of Mr. Strobel. Dexter is the one villain in the case, and although Mr. Pembroke's conduct may be open to question in one respect, criticism would be finical for I don't see how he could have acted otherwise. I shall have to go back a long way now, but I will be brief. Matthew Pembroke had a brother, Charles, and a sister, Sophie. You, Miss Hilman, are her daughter. You know, of course, the family differ-

ence and the occasion of it. Your mother married against the wishes of your Uncle Charles, her elder brother and her guardian, and when she was left a widow he declined to help her. Your Uncle Matthew was kinder, and when she died he took you into his own home. Charles was apparently relentless to the end, and there was never any communication between you and him; but when he died, a short time ago, it was found that he had remembered you in his will. Two days before the wedding day Mr. Pembroke was notified that you were heiress to one hundred thousand dollars if you were unmarried. The will provided that in the event of your being a maiden, the entire sum was to be held by Matthew Pembroke, and administered by him in your interest. If you were married, twenty-five thousand dollars was to be set aside for you, and the balance was to go to educational institutions specifically named.

"Mr. Pembroke was worrying about his obligation to Dexter, which he could not meet, and in his fretting he mentioned this to Dexter. He did not tell you at first, because he feared you might think you ought to postpone your wedding, and he did not regard such etiquette as necessary. Without saying a word to Pembroke, this wretch, Dexter, plotted and effected the abduction, thus compelling you to remain a maiden. The bequest was immediately available and he brought all possible pressure to bear upon Mr. Pembroke to make use of it for wiping out the debt. It was absolute ruin to him if he did not. Mr. Pembroke suspected Dexter, but what could he do? He had nothing but improbable conjecture to work upon, and Dexter applied the screws mercilessly. They went to New York to make arrangements for collecting the inheritance. While there they were both in terror lest you discover the truth, for once at least you saw them with the man who could have revealed the financial secret of the situation. You remember looking in at the hotel entrance and seeing Dexter, your uncle and a third man walking in the corridor? The third man was the executor

of your Uncle Charles' estate, and Dexter walked him out of your sight as quickly as possible, lest troublesome questions should be asked.

"It all came down to this, at last, that with your signature to-day to a document that the executors of the estate had prepared, and which you would have signed readily at your uncle's request, the money would have been turned over. The document came in the first mail, but Dexter did not turn up, and Mr. Pembroke could not find him. That was because, shortly after breakfast, I came here and found the villain, at last, giving Strobel sufficient nourishment to keep him alive. I bound him to the chair, but didn't release Strobel at the moment. After a mental struggle that I will not describe, I had determined to take him to you, Miss Hilman, and I was too proud to permit my plans to be balked. Moreover, I believed your uncle guilty, and I was determined that everybody who had been concerned in making you unhappy, should suffer the most extreme tortures that I could inflict. I had already bought and frightened Patterson. It was through him that I discovered this place, a hotel Dexter had seized for debt. After I had succeeded in eluding your pursuit this morning, I attacked Mr. Pembroke. I spent nearly the whole afternoon with him, and, to be brief, I got the story from him and drove him to the verge of insanity. He does not know yet what happened to Strobel, although he is aware that he is safe.

"Having thus punished Mr. Pembroke, unjustly I will admit, to some extent, I came here and took away Strobel. He was very weak and suffering from the drug which had frequently been administered to him with his food. I am familiar with such matters, and I had in my room an antidote. By your attempted pursuit of me you had prevented me from going there to get it, so I had to take Strobel with me to Bulfinch Place before restoring him to you. We had a little scene at the lodging-house——" Poubalov paused here and glanced with a smile at Palovna.

"Is it any wonder, Alexander Poubalov?" cried

Palovna, flushing; "I regarded you as our enemy, and when I saw you with Strobel helpless in your possession, my worst suspicions were confirmed. I——"

"You could have shot me with a clear conscience! I understand and I understood then. You are a loyal friend, Paul Palovna, and I owe you my life, not on this occasion, perhaps, but at that other time—no matter! The past is past and things are as they are! The short of it is, Miss Hilman, that we satisfied Palovna that matters were not as bad as they looked, and, as you see, he came along with us. We went to Mr. Pembroke's. As you were not there, we came directly here. And that, I think, is the whole story."

Clara was weeping silently, and Ivan stood with his arm around her. There was a moment of silence, and then the party was disturbed by a hubbub in the hall below. It proved to be nothing serious. Mike had been ordered by his employer to return. He, too, had called at Mr. Pembroke's and so found his way to the tavern, and coming upon Patterson he had proceeded to thump him. Poubalov separated the antagonists, and went back to the chamber with the candle. The others stood under the porch, for the front door had been opened by Patterson, until he returned.

"If there is anything more to be said," he remarked, "we'd better go to Mr. Pembroke's."

Poubalov did not remain long with the lovers whom he had reunited. The supreme will of his imperial majesty, he gravely declared, would not permit of his lingering a moment after the accomplishment of his mission. It would give him profound pleasure to report that Mr. Strobel was too firmly attached to America to feel, much less commit hostility to the empire of the czar. And so he took his leave, Clara alone realizing that all well-meant efforts to detain him were calculated to give him needless pain.

Mr. Pembroke recovered rapidly under the relief occasioned by the reappearance of Ivan, for whose absence

he felt vaguely accountable. With the death of Dexter the business pressure was so far relieved that he could see his way clear from the trouble, for all he had needed was the time to turn in that the wretched miser would not grant.

But little time was allowed to elapse before the strange interlude in Clara's wedding was brought to an end. A few days after the ceremony Ivan read a brief cable dispatch announcing the arrival of the Cephalonia at Queens-town.

"A steerage passenger," it said, "traveling as Nicolaievitch, but known to be one Litizki, of Boston, jumped from the rail and was drowned shortly after the steamer sighted the Irish coast."

"Poor Litizki!" thought Ivan, "he died for us," and he cut the item out to show to his wife if at some time she should ask whether anything had been heard of the little tailor.

[THE END]



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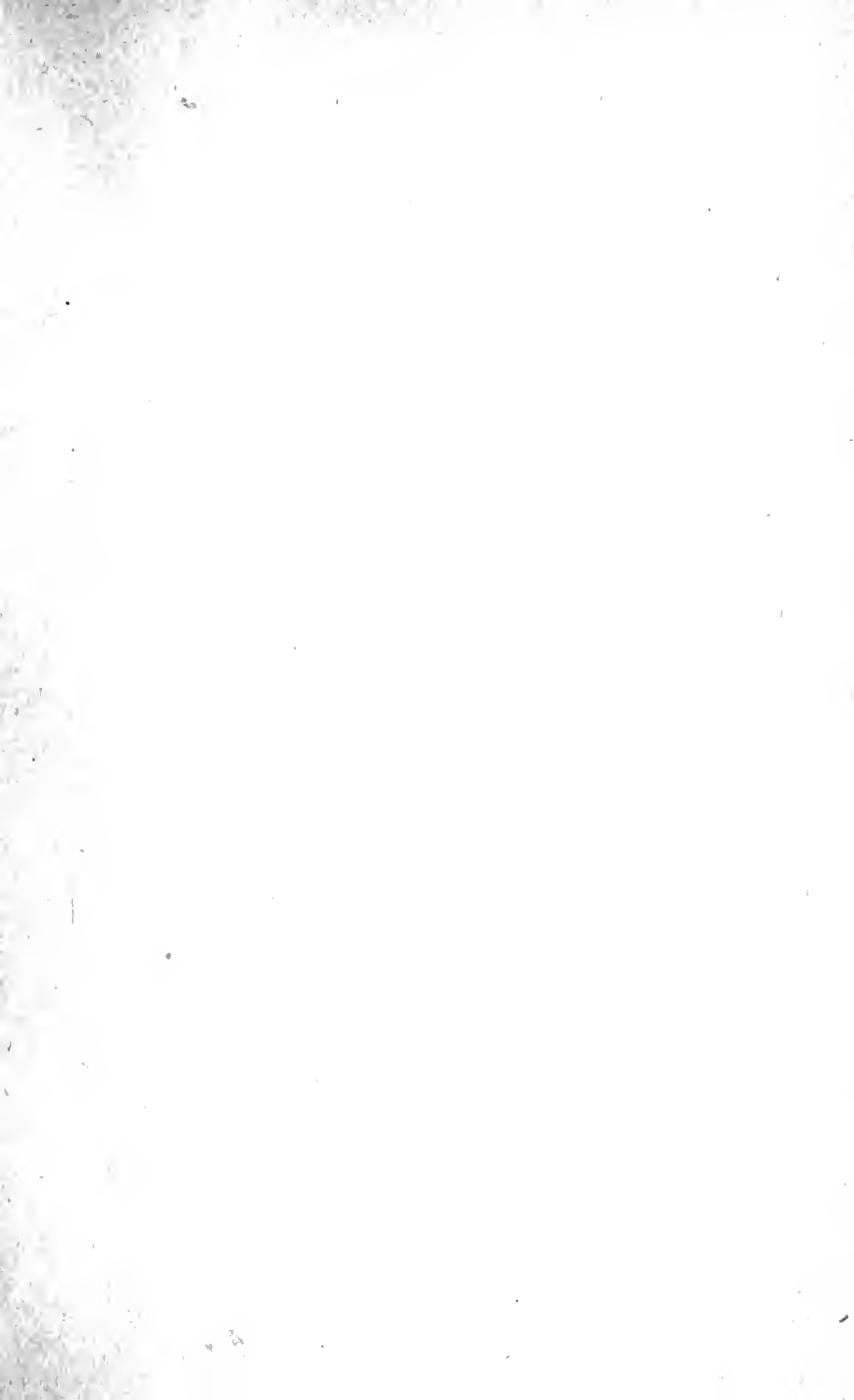
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